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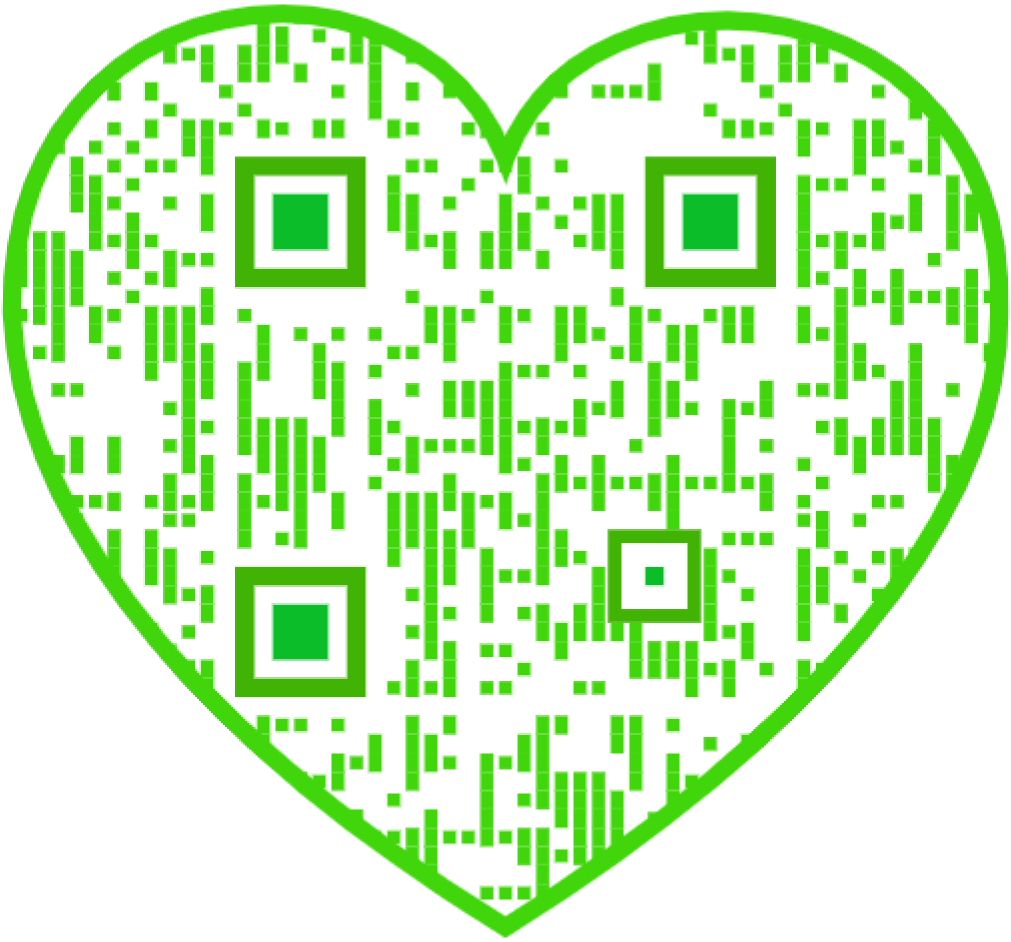

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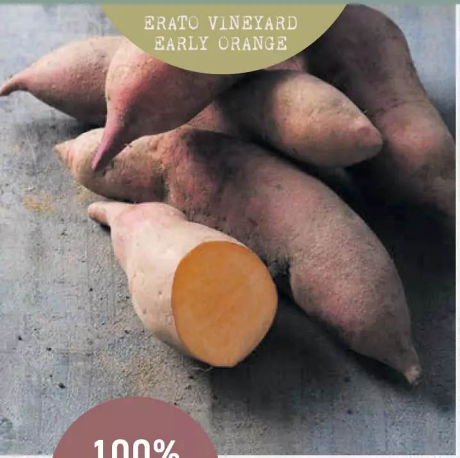

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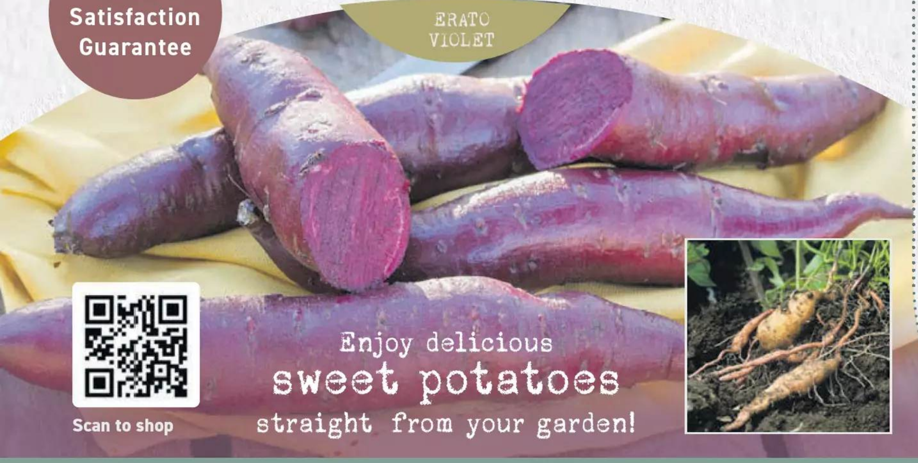

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Amateur GARDENING 141 years of practical advice
1884 The world's oldest gardening magazine 2025

A warm welcome

Gardening is more important than ever

What a tonic this lovely recent weather has been for us all. The sunlight so vivid and bright, the sky so blue, and all of us so grateful to feel the natural world slowly emerging from winter slumber. Yes, it's still early in the year, and cold can still 'bite', but what a pleasure it has been to garden with the promise of the year and warmth ahead. There are plenty of sunny gardening days before us where we can soak in the simple but satisfying pleasure (sheer joy, even, at times) of the natural world, and the beautiful blooms and happy harvests coming our way.

We are blessed with the opportunity to garden. To tend our outside spaces, large or small, either on our own or with others in the community, and to see plants grow, the seasons progress and harvests arrive. The natural rhythms of the year, the sounds of the garden, the feel and texture of plants and the grounding we can achieve from gardening is more important than ever. It has the potential to provide a safe, nurturing, reassuring space for us all. Everyone should have the opportunity to garden.

I would therefore urge you dear readers to, where you can, pass on a little slice of the gardening tonic to others. To encourage people into your outside space where possible, or to maybe reach out into your local community with a few spare plants and seeds. Anything helps, small actions all add up and together we gardeners can spread the word (and the love), bringing more green-fingered greatness around us as we grow. There is a lot of personal empowerment, satisfaction and hope to be found in the everyday and on-the-ground, sharing the care and kindness towards others that we could all do with right now.

Please write in with ideas, experiences and tales, we'd love to hear about your thoughts on wellbeing through gardening this year. We will also be picking up on the reader garden profiles again soon, so please do write in if you'd like us to consider featuring your garden. We need about 800 words and at least six or seven high resolution images. Please send them to editor@amateurgardening.com

This issue our merry band of brilliant expert *AG* contributors include Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Sue Bradley, Graham Clarke, Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, Beth Chatto Gardens, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Stephanie Hafferty, Adam Kirtland, Liz Zorab, Nick Hamilton, Rosie Irving, Kim O'Brien and Toby Buckland.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Please keep writing in. I love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of *AG* continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart *AG*'s editor-in-chief

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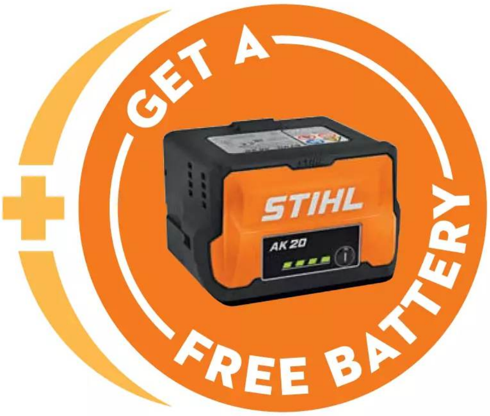
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NEXT ISSUE OUT
5 April 2025

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Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

Bringing you some of the gardening news highlights

Garden centres reopen thanks to new owner

British Garden Centres is breathing new life into the gardening industry

There is good news on the horticultural retail front as British Garden Centres announce they have bought and reopened seven garden centres.

The sites at Shinfield, near Reading; Gloucester, Gosforth, Heighley Gate, Rugby, Havant, and Northampton were previously owned by Dobbies, and recently closed due to financial pressures.

Charles Stubbs, founder and director of British Garden Centres, said: "We have a clear vision for the growth of these centres and are excited to integrate with the local communities while building on the strong foundations that are already in place."

The company, which now has a portfolio of 67 stores, opened these new additions at the end of February 2025 after working hard to make sure stock levels were high and everything ready to go.

Charles and Amy Stubbs, who founded British Garden Centres and have revived seven former Dobbies outlets

British Garden Centres has retained all existing centre team members and is looking forward to working with them to ensure the continued success of these sites in the local communities they serve.

Anyone interested in joining the team should check the British Garden Centres website: www.britishgardencentres.com/careers/ and the social media pages of each centre.

The legume barrel medic may be the key to revolutionising sustainable farming

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Humble legume may lead to improved farming practices

A breakthrough has been made in the fight to reduce the amount of fertilisers used in arable farming.

Excessive use of fertilisers has become a major ecological problem and been linked to soil degradation and river pollution, where enriched run-off from farmland causes algal blooms and kills aquatic life.

Now scientists at the John Innes Foundation in Norfolk have discovered a natural phenomenon that makes plant roots more attractive to soil microbes, meaning the plants need less food to thrive.

The team discovered a mutation in the legume *Medicago truncatula*, also known as barrel medic, superpowers the relationship between plant roots and soil-borne bacteria and fungi that supply plants with nitrogen and phosphorus.

This improves the plant's take-up of nutrients, meaning a reduction in the amount of synthetic fertilisers needed for crops to thrive.

"We can now think of developing a new type of environmentally friendly farming with crops that require less artificial fertiliser," said Dr Myriam Charpentier, whose group carried out the research.

Several spring flowers can be toxic to dogs

While we're all revelling in the return of spring, the Dogs Trust is warning pet owners to watch out for signs of spring bulb poisoning in their pooches.

Daffodils, tulips, bluebells and amaryllis, and shrubs such as rhododendrons and azaleas, are all toxic to dogs, and man's best friend can also be made unwell by drinking water from vases that have contained these plants.

Buttercups, crocuses, primroses, cyclamens, elders, foxgloves, hyacinth bulbs and lupins are also poisonous, and all the plants can cause a range of symptoms including upset stomachs, vomiting, lethargy, trembling, breathlessness and irritation of the mouth and skin.

Charlie Dobson, senior veterinary surgeon at Dogs Trust, said: "Although cases of poisoning are rare, knowing which plants are dangerous and keeping them out of reach can help prevent accidental poisoning.

"If you suspect your dog has eaten anything they shouldn't have, including spring bulbs, you must seek vet advice promptly, even if they are not showing any symptoms. The sooner your dog is treated, the better their chances of a full recovery."

For more information on which plants are poisonous to dogs, visit the Dogs Trust website: www.dogstrust.org.uk.

Above: Vets issue warning over potential bulb poisoning

Easy-growing delights for the summer garden

From lime-green zinnias to apricot begonias, Thompson & Morgan's new 'garden ready' summer plant range has something to whet the appetite of gardeners everywhere.

No matter what size your growing area, the new plants from one of the UK's leading gardening brands are ready to go into the ground when the risk of frost has passed.

The plants are shipped without flowers, but have been grown to produce a greater number of blooms throughout the season. They are also ready to go straight into the ground without further nurturing, making them perfect for time-poor growers.

For the full range of plants, visit the T&M website and search for garden-ready-plants.

Right: *Petunia* Easy Wave Ultimate Mixed offers flamboyant colours

The hunt is on for rare and disappearing daffodils

Can you help record and find these 'lost' spring delights?

They are the stars of one of the UK's most memorable and famous poems, and now the nation's plant lovers are being asked to search for rare and endangered daffodil varieties.

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), which is running the daffodil count, is asking people to log where daffodils are flowering in their area, along with the plants' colour, type and height.

The information will be used to create a daffodil map and shine a light on rare varieties at risk of being lost forever.

The three most vulnerable daffs are 'Mrs RO Backhouse', which was one of the first pink daffodils to be bred, in 1923, with a solid coral-pink trumpet and ivory flowers. It is known to exist in national collections but its whereabouts beyond that is a mystery.

'Mrs William Copeland' is a white, double-flowered daffodil, which has not been for sale in recent years but is known to have been given to a direct descendant of its original UK breeder by an American grower in the early 2000s, while the 'Sussex Bonfire' is a double-flowered yellow and orange breed that has not been seen since 1998.

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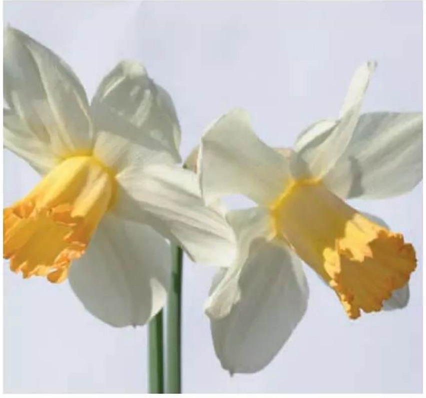


Above: 'Mrs RO Backhouse' is a daff in danger of disappearing

Gwen Hines, the CEO of the charity Plant Heritage, said: "Springtime daffodils are abundant, but rare varieties could be lost from our gardens and roadsides if they're not found and cared for. While six national plant collections do protect some, many others aren't yet safeguarded, which is why we encourage everyone to look for rare varieties this spring."

To take part in the survey and log your daffodil finds, visit www.rhs.org.uk and search for 'daffodils in the UK'

Blenheim celebrates with oak saplings

To mark the 75th anniversary since it first opened to the public, Blenheim Palace has announced a year-long *Blenheim Branches Out* legacy campaign, which will see it donate 75 estate-grown oak saplings to appropriate individuals, charities, schools and organisations.

This is a rare opportunity to own and nurture one of the Blenheim Estate oak saplings, which are not normally available for planting outside the boundaries of the 12,000-acre estate.

Above: Blenheim head forester Nick Baimbridge plants one of the estate's oak saplings

The forestry team at Blenheim has been collecting acorns since 2016 to ensure the incredible trees will still be there hundreds of years from now.

Blenheim's visiting attraction managing director, Heather Carter, said: "We wanted to do something extra special for the 75th anniversary of the palace opening to the public, and this seemed like the perfect way of preserving the past whilst also protecting the future."

The estate's head forester, Nick Baimbridge, added: "We're extremely proud of our programme of propagating and protecting seedlings grown from acorns produced by the original oaks."

Great books for non-gardening days

Spring may be here but the weather is still uncertain, so on those days when it's impossible to get in the garden, why not stay snug indoors and whet your horticultural appetite with the latest book releases?

The newest one to cross our radar is *The Book of Garden Flowers*, written by Christopher Stocks and illustrated by Angie Lewin (Thames & Hudson, £16.99).

It is the perfect book to dip into and learn not just about the carefully curated selection of plants featured, ranging from agapanthus and astrantia to hellebores, calendulas, tulips, nasturtiums and eryngiums, but about their social histories and the people who discovered and bred them.

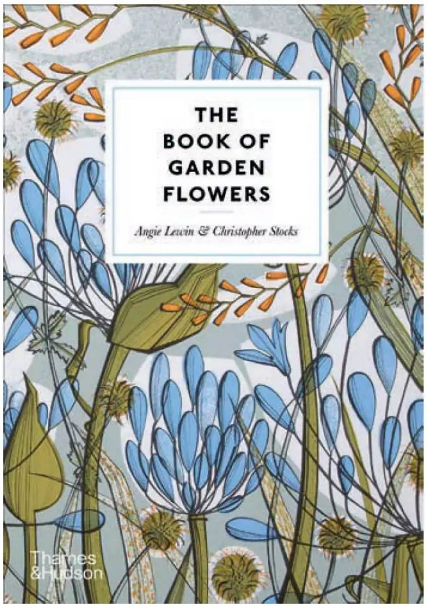
Chris, who lives in Dorset, said: "It's all about finding a new angle and making the history of a particular plant a real story."

Another wonderful new book is *RHS Grow Food Anywhere*, written by *AG*'s Lucy Chamberlain. It is a must for edible growers everywhere, explaining clearly how, and where, to cultivate delicious crops to get the best results.

Our third 'must read' is *The Climate Change Resilient Vegetable Garden* by *AG* editor Kim Stoddart.

This is an indispensable, upbeat guide that offers accessible solutions to help us garden around our changing climate, help the planet, and have more enjoyment in the process.

The Climate Change Resilient Vegetable Garden - How to Grow Food in a Changing Climate.



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Are you involved in community growing projects where you live? Send in your news by emailing **editor@amateurgardening.com**

Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with AG's gardening expert **Ruth Hayes**

I'm topdressing and feeding our patio shrubs instead of re-potting them this year
Inset: The hydrangea is shooting so I'm going to prune it back

Give your long-term pots some springtime TLC

Fresh compost and food will give plants an early-year boost

A job that's been getting closer to the top of my extensive and regularly extended 'to do' list is to give our potted shrubs some love.

I am a huge fan of seasonal flower containers that bring life and light to the garden during even the darkest days (I'm looking at you, my stalwart viola-and-cyclamen-filled creation), but there is something more solidly dependable about more long-term plantings.

This endlessly grey, drab winter has been brightened by our little container skimmia, while visitors have been greeted at the front door by the knockout (in a good way) fragrance of a sweet box *Sarcococca confusa*.

It is still a small shrub, but its little white flowers pack the scented punch of a much larger plant and its arrival coincided perfectly with the slow, sad demise of another brilliant winter-perfumed plant, a *Coronilla valentina subsp. glauca* 'Citrina' that filled the whole front garden with an intoxicating fragrance.

I could find no obvious reason why the coronilla turned up its yellow-flowered toes, but while we have mourned its departure, its removal has given us scope to have fun with the border where it grew.

But I digress... long-term container plantings such as shrubs and potted herbs can either be re-potted now or topdressed to set them up for the growing season.

If your shrubs need moving to larger containers, or you are planning to move them into the soil, water them well the day before starting work as this will make it easier to slide them from their pots without the roots sticking to the sides and tearing.

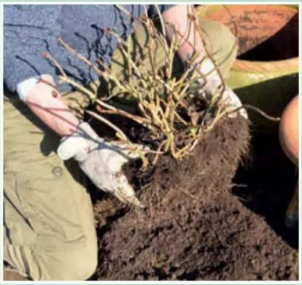
Once they are out, check the roots are healthy and free of pests such as vine weevils. You may want to consider root pruning your plants, using clean, sharp secateurs to remove around 5cm (2in) of thin and feeder roots.

According to RHS research, this can encourage new root growth, help prevent roots circling the pot and help plants re-establish better after replanting.

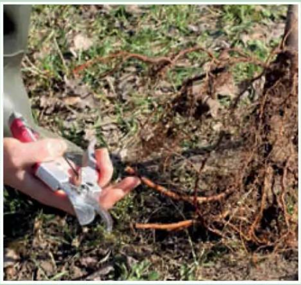
This year I am weeding and topdressing ours, simply removing the uppermost layers of compost, adding some granular fertiliser and refilling the container with fresh peat-free multipurpose compost.

Above: Keep deadheading winter bedding for a prolonged display

Four potted shrub jobs to do now



1 Re-potting shrubs is a good time to assess their overall health and make sure their roots are healthy and pest-free.



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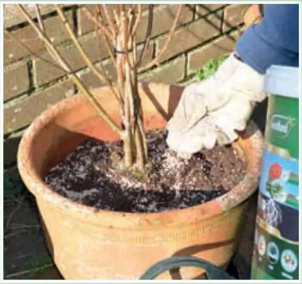
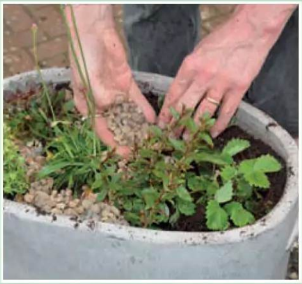
2 Root pruning can encourage new root growth and help trees re-establish better afterwards.



3 I always add some granular fertiliser before topdressing shrubs with compost and watering well.



4 Weed and trim alpines and top refreshed compost with gravel, to look attractive and help drainage.

I'm creating a beach where invertebrates can hide and hedgehogs and birds get to the water safely to drink

Pond care for the year ahead

Healthy plants and water are important to get right now

As regular readers will possibly remember, we gave our pond a complete refurb last autumn.

This included completely emptying it, before reshaping it, giving it more shelves and greater width.

We are very pleased with the end result but it still looks rather new and bare so as spring gets underway one of my projects is to help it bed into the garden and look more natural.

It's a wildlife pond, so I'm going to sow a succession of native annuals around its fringes and add some flag irises and reeds to provide dragonfly and damselfly larvae with something to cling onto as they turn into adults.

Last autumn's work means we have little maintenance to do now, but if your pond is more established it will need some attention to help it emerge from its overwintered state.

Filters and pumps should be cleaned and checked before being put back into use, and it's time to remove any plant material that has fallen in over the winter before it can start to degrade and contaminate the water.

Trim or divide plants that have grown too large, scoop out some of the more invasive varieties before they can take over, and leave the debris on the side for a day or so, so any trapped critters can return to the water.

If you have ornamental fish, you may wish to do a water test to make sure the quality and balance is as it should be. The fish may be sluggish after winter's chill, so keep them safe from herons and other predators by netting the surface.

Even a small water feature adds something special and benefits wildlife. A bowl with pebbles and a few small plants, or a half-barrel on the patio is enough to attract new life into your garden.

If space is tight, why not create a patio barrel pond?

Scatter seeds thinly and protect them from cats

PEPPER DUST

Sowing hardy annuals direct

Get started for lots of easy colour

- As the soil warms up it becomes a much more hospitable place for seeds to nestle into and get on with germinating.
- Having bided our time and curbed our impatience, we can now start sowing hardy annuals directly into the soil where we want them to grow.
- Yes, we could have done this earlier in the year but the weather has been so relentlessly chill and damp they are more likely to have rotted (or been eaten by birds and rodents) than rooted.
- Most annuals fare best in a sunny area with soil that drains well, but if you are sowing for shade, readjust accordingly.
- Remove weed and debris and rake the soil until it is light and crumbly before wetting it.
- Scatter seeds thinly (seedlings that grow too close together can be thinned later) and cover with a little more soil, firming it gently with the back of a rake.
- Add a label to avoid disturbance and puff some pepper dust over the soil to deter cats.
- Sow more annuals every few weeks through the spring and summer and you should be able to look forward to months of easy colour ahead.

Move plants that fail to thrive or get too big

I'm not one for unnecessary fiddling about in the garden, and once a plant is in and thriving, I tend to leave it to go about its business unmolested.

However, there are times when a plant fails to thrive or does the exact opposite and romps away to the point that little else gets a look in, at which time I will consider finding somewhere more suitable.

We have a gorgeous, deep cerise 'Atropurpureum' ornamental thistle that has outgrown its spot so while the garden is still getting going for the year ahead, I've moved it to a more spacious location.

Early spring is an ideal time to move plants because the soil is getting warmer and spring showers will help keep the roots hydrated as they reestablish (though be prepared to water if we have a prolonged dry spell).

Start by creating the new planting hole, adding some bone meal or well-rotted manure, then dig around the plant and carefully lift it, keeping some soil around the roots.

If you haven't already dug a spot for it, wrap the roots in damp newspaper to stop them drying out. Replant as soon as you can, at the same depth as before, spreading the roots and covering them with a mix of soil and compost, firming it down as you go to knock out air pockets.

Water well and mulch with organic material (well-rotted compost, manure, leaf mould or bark chips).

Above: **Carefully dig around your plant to avoid damaging the roots when lifting** Inset: Water well after replanting

Last year's chilli harvest was bountiful and I'm hoping for the same in 2025

A new home for my chilli seedlings

The young plants are ready for larger pots and more nutritious compost

In my eagerness to start the growing year, I sowed our chilli seeds much earlier than usual.

Although they are in a heated propagator, I was slightly apprehensive how they would fare, as the light levels have been atrocious, but miraculously they have germinated into several robust little plants.

Now the day has come when they are ready to be moved from their trays of seed compost into something meatier.

The varieties I have grown are 'Prairie Fire', which is described as 'hot', and then 'Big Sun' and 'Paper Lantern Habanero', which are apparently 'very hot' - so hold on to your hats!

I'm using peat-free multipurpose compost and the little plants will continue their lives on a light windowsill before being moved to the greenhouse when the weather is warm enough.

Potting on seedlings is a task I love. Germination can be hit-and-miss early in the year, so to see these little plants thriving is a real thrill. Moving them into larger pots and meatier compost is the next triumphant stage in cultivation, a sign that life goes on and the promise of fruits or flowers to follow.

But pricking out, as the process of potting on seedlings is called, needs a steady and a gentle touch and I like to take my time.

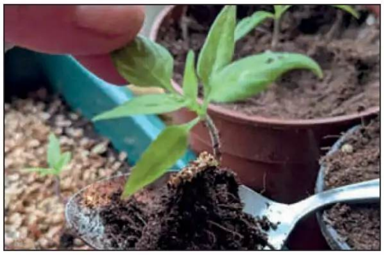
The most important thing to remember is to hold your seedlings by a leaf, never their delicate stem because if this is crushed or damaged it will kill or stunt the plant.

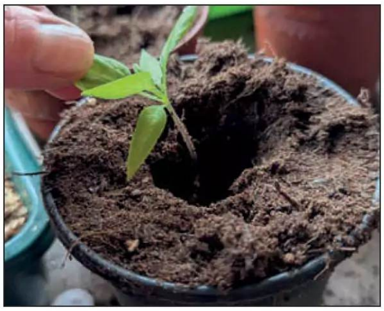
Fill a 7cm (3in) pot with compost and make a deep hole in the centre. With a little leaf between finger and thumb, carefully scoop the seedling's roots from the compost using an old teaspoon or plant label.

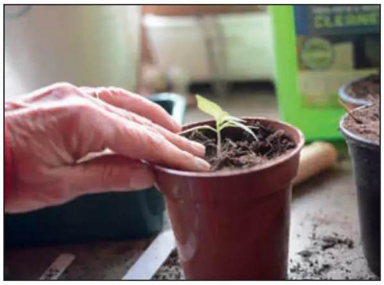
Pop the roots and stem into the compost and gently firm it down. Don't worry if the stem goes deep - it will produce extra roots along its length for strong growth.

Pot on seedlings

More nutrients means strong growth


1 Carefully lift the seedlings from their seed composter, scooping up the rootball and gently holding a leaf.


2 Pop the roots and some of the stem into the hole you will have already created in the pots of fresh compost.


3 Press down on the compost around the stem with your fingertips to firm it down and support the plant.

4 Place your seedlings somewhere light and airy. Keep the compost damp and turn them so they don't bend to the light.

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Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Space-savvy growing, tomato alternatives and perennial basils

Lucy explains how to make the most of the next few weeks

Lucy explains how to maximise space with home-made supports for climbing crops

I feel incredibly lucky to have a decent-sized garden, but it hasn't always been that way – I've had studio flats, tiny courtyards and half allotment plots – it's never stopped me growing my own food! Still today, I like to cram as many edibles onto my veggie plot as possible, so 'space-savvy' growing is right up my street. Are there a few easy tricks I've learnt along the way? Of course there are, so let me share them with you.

Firstly, climbing crops are your friend. Runner beans, French beans, old-fashioned taller pea varieties – all these edibles have a small footprint yet their cropping power is huge. A key tip with podded edible climbers is to keep picking them whilst they're small – this will encourage more and more pods to form. Trailing squashes, pumpkins and courgettes can also be trained up stout poles, frames or archways – just be sure these supports can take the crop's weight if it's a large-fruited type. I'm lucky in that I have some hazel trees in my garden that give me poles and peasticks, but I've also seen some very attractive arbours made from livestock fencing.

Cordon tomatoes (also called indeterminate) can be trained up bamboo canes – plants trained with a single main stem can easily reach 5ft outdoors tall by the end of the season, and 9ft if grown under glass. All these vigorous edibles are best grown in the ground/borders, rather than pots, to make watering easier. And a quick word to the wise – I've personally found small vertical pouch planters and pots tricky to manage come the height of the season – by then the plants' mature root systems demand a LOT of regular watering.

I should add that veg aren't the only amazing vertical edibles – raspberry canes take up very little bed space yet yield phenomenally. Small walls and fences can also house fan-trained currants or gooseberries, and larger ones can support fan-trained cherries, plums, gages, peaches and figs. My conclusion, small plots needn't compromise your cropping power one little bit.

Sow tomato relatives

✿ Can I share with you a mind-boggling fact? Tomatoes (and related potatoes, peppers and aubergines) are collectively just a tiny, tiny fraction of the edibles belonging to *Solanaceae*. This plant family also contains many other plants that we can grow as food (being the responsible writer that I am, I should also point out that it contains many poisonous species, so please only eat the ones that I list here!). So, why not try some of the other delicious edibles that share some genetics with tomatoes? I'm a regular sower of tomatillos (*Physalis ixocarpa*) and Cape gooseberries (*Physalis peruviana*), and long to try more groundcherries (*Physalis pubescens* and *Physalis viscosa*), along with pepino fruits (*Solanum muricatum*), and also vila-vila/sticky nightshade (*Solanum sisymbriifolium*) because this plant looks highly ornamental, as well as edible. Sow all as you would tomatoes, under cover in spring, to harden off for a sunny spot (or alternatively grow entirely in a greenhouse/polytunnel). I'll see you later in summer for a barbecue with salsa verde and cape gooseberry garnishes!

Cape Gooseberry
KINGS SEEDS
Tasty vegetables
TOMATILLO
VERDE

Lucy looks at some of the other edible tomato family crops such as tomatillos and Cape gooseberries ↗

All images unless otherwise credited © Lucy Chamberlain

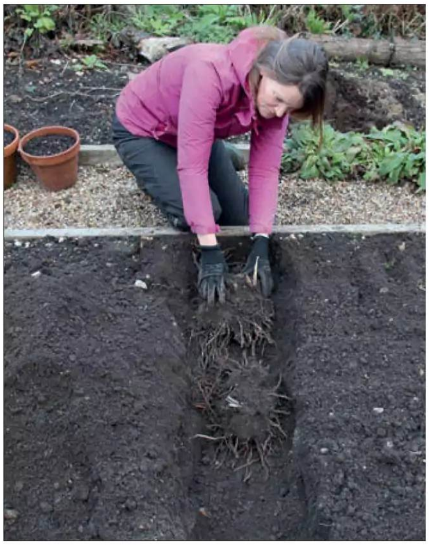
Step by step Plant (or move) asparagus:

Asparagus is always labelled as a luxury veg – and I'd tend to agree! My patch of it needs moving, but now is also a great time to start off new beds. The fleshy roots (known as crowns) are available bare root now from garden centres and via mail order. They'll give you harvests for 20 or so years, so lets give them a flying start:

Fish, Blood & Bone

1 Firstly, prepare your new site. Choose one that's not grown asparagus before – it should be in an open, sunny site with free-draining soil. It's crucial to ensure there are no perennial weeds present (e.g. ground elder or bindweed), so choose the bed wisely. Work in an organic slow-release feed, such as fish, blood and bone.

2 You may be able to omit this step if you're buying new crowns – think yourself lucky because this is hard work! These young crowns need moving, so I'm digging them up carefully, but they anchor themselves in well. Remember which way up plants are as they look very similar the right way up, and upsidedown.



3 Plant your crowns in trenches, deep enough so that the top of the crown centre sits 2-3cm (1-1.5in) below soil level. Spread the roots out along the trench evenly, and space your crowns roughly 40cm (16in) apart. Backfill the trench with soil to its original level, water in gently and don't harvest spears until spring of 2026 at the earliest.

Cleaning and re-using pots

Top tip

✿ I'll confess, I'm a bit of a hoarder, so the shed behind me is FULL of pots. Regardless of whether I'm a 'make do and mender', a 'thrifty gardener', or an 'upcycler', I like to think that I'm not a contributor to the disposable society. Just to confirm these pots are not, for me, 'single-use plastic' – some of them have been my gardening companions for at least 15 years! I re-use them heavily during the propagation and potting on season, but do you really have to clean them all before re-using your old pots? I confess not to, but I do follow guidelines. If any seedlings showed signs of botrytis (grey mould) or damping off, I wash those pots. If any larger potted plants showed signs of soilborne pests or diseases (e.g. vine weevil), I wash those pots. Otherwise, a quick dust off is all they get.

Right: No single-use plastic when you reuse your old pots for many years

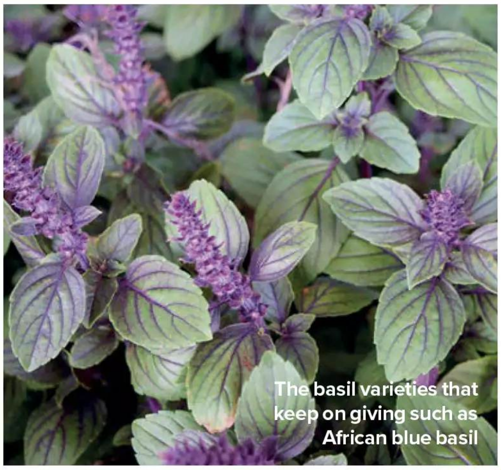
Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Why not try…?

Perennial basils

✿ While many of us grow basil (*Ocimum sp)* as an annual, most can actually be classified as tender perennials, even *O. basilicum*, or sweet basil, which is by far the most widely grown form. The characteristic that varies is how reliably that particular basil comes back year on year, with some (including *O. basilicum*) being best called 'short-lived perennials' and others, 'woody shrubs'. So, while we're all on very familiar terms with sweet basil and may well continue to grow this as an annual from seed each spring, let me introduce you to some other, less well known forms, that can prove to be more reliably perennial. African Blue basil and the closely related camphor basil (*O. kilimandscharicum*) are both highly ornamental, reliably perennial basils. *O. gratissimum* (East Indian basil) is actually a small shrub, and both *O. tenuiflorum* (holy basil) and *O. americanum* (hoary basil) are reliably perennial. So, sweet basil, make some room!



The basil varieties that keep on giving such as African blue basil

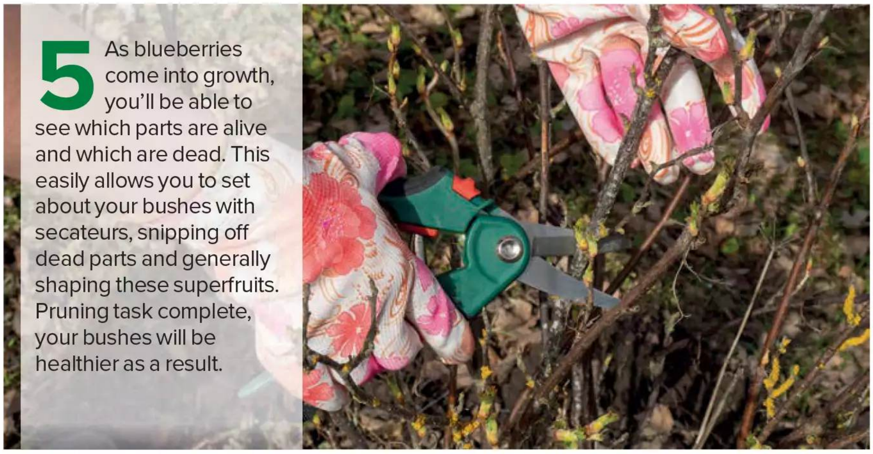
5 quick jobs…

1 Leek lovers – can you bear to cast your mind towards winter? A shuddering thought, I know, but if you want good-sized leeks for the cold season of 2025/26 then now is the time to sow them. I have great results with F1 hybrid 'Warwick', multi-sowing into a pot, then separating out the seedlings to plant in beds.

2 Potatoes are an essential crop for many gardeners, and now is the time to get them planted. Either place one tuber per 30cm diameter pot of loam-based multipurpose compost, with a little potato feed added (e.g. Elixir Spuds Galore), or plant in beds on the plot, again sprinkling some feed in first.

3 Kale crisps, bubble and squeak, stuffed cabbage leaves – bring out your best brassica recipes to use up these robust edibles. They've stood well all winter but as the days lengthen and temperatures gently rise, they'll begin to flower or 'bolt', which destroys their eating qualities.

4 It may seem a surprising task, but don't forget to ventilate your greenhouse and cold frames if needed. Spring sunshine brings warmth, raising temperatures to well above 20°C under cover, and even more (35°C) within propagators. So, open vents on sunny days to prevent fried seedlings.



5 As blueberries come into growth, you'll be able to see which parts are alive and which are dead. This easily allows you to set about your bushes with secateurs, snipping off dead parts and generally shaping these superfruits. Pruning task complete, your bushes will be healthier as a result.

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Small space | Big ideas

With **Nick Hamilton** of Barnsdale Gardens

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The lovely bowl-shaped blooms of *Philadelphus coronarius*

© Shutterstock

Physocarpus is a dramatic shrub with dark leaves and contrasting snowy flowers

© Shutterstock

The best compact shrubs for compact spaces

Nick Hamilton explains why small is beautiful when blooms and leaves work to glorious effect

Spring is such a wonderful and inspirational time of year as the garden bursts forth from winter. Smaller spaces require smaller shrubs and although these may be more delicate, they can still pack a punch if you choose the right varieties. Fortunately there are choices for every situation a more compact garden offers.

Mock orange (*Philadelphus sp*)

This has to be one of my favourites. Most varieties grow as wide as they are tall, making them unsuitable for a smaller garden, but there are several that fit the bill.

P. microphyllus has single white flowers and grows to 90x90cm (3x3ft), while the newer 'Pearls of Perfume' boasts double white flowers and a columnar habit, growing up to 1.2m (4ft) and only spreading 60cm (2ft).

Another taller but also columnar variety is *P*. 'Erectus', again with white flowers but this one reaches 1.2-1.8m (4-6ft). They all have very sweetly scented flowers for you to enjoy and all can be grown in a container, in sun or semi-shade.

Gardening on alkaline clay, but still wanting to grow heathers, I focus on those varieties that are lime tolerant.

Erica x *darleyensis* types are such plants and I have the variety 'George Rendall' growing happily in my limestone pavement at Barnsdale. The purple-pink flowers on this small evergreen shrub begin in autumn and flower all winter until the end of spring, making it the perfect plant to help see in the new season.

Foliage to complement the flowers

One of my absolute must-haves for my displays in the Great Pavillion at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show every year was physocarpus, which flowers in May and June. This plant produces lovely dome-shaped clusters of white flowers just at the right time and a stunning, compact variety is Little Angel ('Hoogio16').

However, this variety is definitely not just about the flowers, as in spring the palmate foliage emerges a gorgeous red-orange colour before maturing to a dark purple-red, also giving lovely autumnal tints.

On the theme of perfect spring-flowering and evergreen shrubs, I defy anyone to beat a daphne. These wonderful shrubs are always recognisable by the heady scent they produce, which is detectable long before the plant comes into view.

A compact, semi-evergreen variety that will only reach a size of 90x90cm (3x3ft) is *Daphne* x *transatlantica* Eternal Fragrance ('Blafra'). Not only is this variety very fragrant, it also flowers over an extraordinarily long period, with its white flowers produced on the new growth, as opposed to the previous season's growth like most other spring-flowering varieties. The blooms start to appear in April, continually flowering until October!

It will grow happily in sun or semi-shade in well-drained soil, although daphnes do not like to get too dry so a little water applied during very dry spells would be beneficial, as would a little shelter from cold winds.

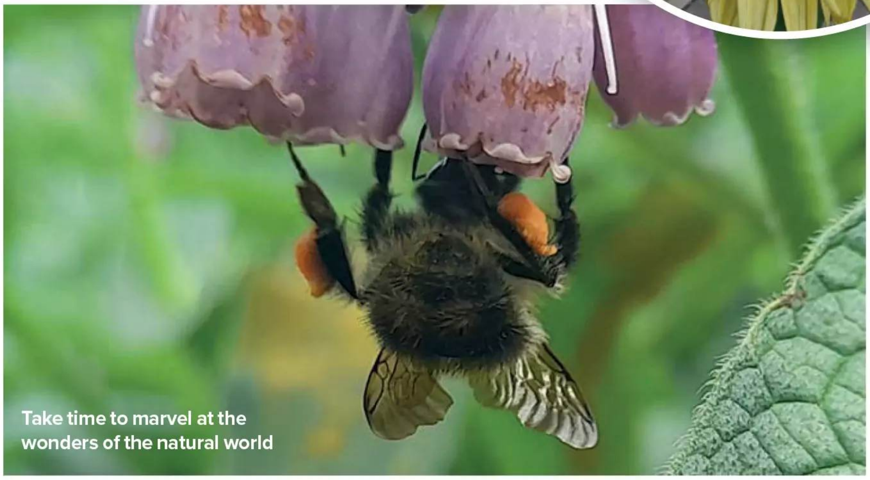
Right: The sweet-scented loveliness of *Daphne* x *transatlantica* Eternal Fragrance

■ Barnsdale Gardens in Rutland, East Midlands, has been enthralling garden fans since 1983 when Geoff Hamilton, the much-loved presenter of BBC *Gardeners' World*, bought a Victorian farmhouse with over five acres of land. Barnsdale was Geoff's 'great experiment' in peat-free and chemical-free growing, and his legacy continues today with his son Nick ensuring that the 38 gardens are kept to the stunning standard for which they are renowned. **Visit barnsdalegardens.co.uk**

Connect with your garden and let nature provide nurturing

4 feel-good gardening gems

Editor **Kim Stoddart** shares some upbeat gardening ideas to maximise wellbeing opportunities in our gardens and green spaces


Take time to marvel at the wonders of the natural world

Our precious gardens, no matter their size, afford us the opportunity to grow plants, connect with the natural world in all its glory and benefit from time spent gardening. We know how good it feels with a little sun on our backs, as early season blooms start to emerge, pollinators buzz excitedly about and birds flutter back and forth with food and spring frolics in mind. The sense of growth and renewal as the daylight hours increase is strong at this time of year and hope for the growing year ahead is abounding.

It's no wonder that gardening is recommended by the NHS for mental and physical health. Let's face it, we all need a little nurturing and joy right now. I've run lots of therapeutic gardening projects and courses over the years for the National Botanic Gardens of Wales and other organisations, and personal resilience is as important as the on-the-ground solutions when it comes to gardening around extreme weather. It is the backbone that steadies and grounds us.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share some of my own experiences and ideas around personal wellbeing to help you find some enjoyment, save money and reap rewards in your gardens over the weeks and months ahead.

Switch off to switch on

That's an obvious thing to say, but hands up - who often feels guilty about all the things they need to be doing in the garden, especially as the season progresses? 'Gardener guilt' comes up time and time again with the courses I run, as we see images on the TV and social media of picture-perfect gardens, and the pressure to compete and conform flows over us. What we see on camera (and behind the scenes) is not the full picture of course; untidy areas can be hidden from view and in the case of TV, there will usually be many helping hands at work.

What we need now more than anything is to make life easier for ourselves, to enjoy the space and to be at peace in our gardens, to just sit and stare and let our minds settle. You can't always get to such an emotionally regulated space straight away, especially not if your mind is buzzing with things you need to do and think about, whether it's work, the news, or the bleeping mobile phone in your pocket.

Leave them all behind and tune into your garden by walking around it, doing some light weeding or pruning. Focus on this and the task at hand, and your mind will begin to become less 'fight or flight' and fizzy (as I call it). Touching leaves and soil, connecting with the real things around you can help massively to bring the mind down to earth and ground ourselves.

If it helps, gift yourself 20 mins of such unrushed guilt-free time a day, and before long it will become second nature as your brain and body adjusts.

No matter how much I need to do, I garden every day, even in some small way for 30 minutes or an hour, leaving all technology behind when I do. Walking around, tuning in and slowing myself down works well for me, as does focusing on calm breathing, which helps to settle the mind and allows me to be in the moment. I used to do this exercise when

Kim teaching gardening and wellbeing at Kate Humble's training garden a few years back

All images unless stated © Kim Stoddart

Kim having fun teaching with some of the brilliant Tyfu Creuddyn community garden group

An old kitchen bin turned into a back door herb planter

© Shutterstock

Above: **Have fun transforming old items such as this kettle into planting opportunities**

Above: **Grow plants that will encourage beautiful, beneficial insects**

I was running a project for young autistic adults, but I found since the pandemic that everyone benefits in some way from such mindful gardening, including myself!

Remember this calm space is also great for planning and problem solving in your garden if you need an excuse to slow right down.

I like racing through gardening tasks as well. Things need to get done after all, but my daily mindful gardening time is for me and is blissfully guilt and rush-free.

Make something out of nothing

Whether it's repairing a broken item such as my ramshackle but effective recent polytunnel door fix, reusing old items in a positive and new way (such as turning wellies or shoes into fun planters), or growing on some kitchen leftovers (e.g. fruit pips and stones), the personal satisfaction to be had is immense. It's a small act but an important one because you have done something in the here and now which is both clever and creative.

You have solved problems and saved money, or saved an item from landfill, and together these little wins all add up. It's incredibly rewarding to know you can do this for yourself, taking back control from a crazy world one item at a time and you are doing your bit for the planet the more you transform waste items into something wonderful. In that moment, all is good in the world.

Reach out to others

There really is power and potential in working with people in your area, be it seed swaps, community gardens, or simple little acts of care and kindness along the way. It could be propagating extra plants, growing extra seedlings (in a relaxed way) to pass on to others, or simply reaching out to lend a collaborative smile, hello or helping hand to friends, family or complete and utter strangers.

Compliments and acknowledgments don't cost anything and they can make you and others feel good in the moment. It was lovely to see when I was recently talking about climate change gardening at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle that just the simple act of using individuals' names when they asked me questions, listening and personalising the connection, meant I was acknowledging them to the audience. It resulted in some really meaningful feel-good moments for all concerned.

Personalise and play

The more you can make your garden reflect your own preferences and interests, the more enjoyable it will be. I'm adding in a few extra water features this year; a mini sink pond in the polytunnel which won't cost anything, and a stone water fountain by the house which will bring much enjoyment, also more bird feeders….

Plus, I love trying out new varieties of edibles so there's plenty of that in the pipeline, and I have a new hammock I can't wait to find a home for. I'll probably hang it by one of the bird feeders on the outside of the vegetable garden so I can fully enjoy my garden and all the glory of the natural world.

See *www.greenrocketcourses.com* for details of courses and talks Kim is doing this year

CRESCENT garden
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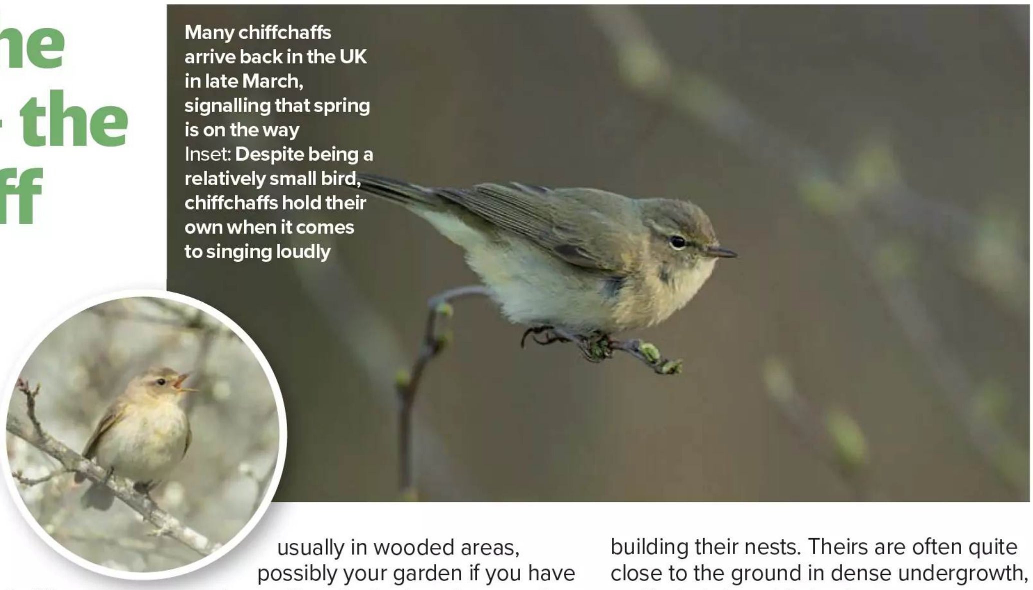
Kim connecting with gardeners in America sharing climate change gardening skills and a love of *AG* magazine

Garden wildlife watch

Bird of the month – the chiffchaff

The first call of this wonderful warbler heralds the onset of spring



Many chiffchaffs arrive back in the UK in late March, signalling that spring is on the way
Inset: **Despite being a relatively small bird, chiffchaffs hold their own when it comes to singing loudly**

© John Bridges / Ben Andrew RSPB Images

After what feels like a long, dark winter, seeing, hearing and even feeling signs that a new season is definitely on the way really has the power to lift your spirits - like the first warmth of spring sunshine on the face, or hearing the first chiffchaff of the year!

It's not because this bird is the most impressive looking – it's small and brown, with little to distinguish it looks-wise. And its song is an uncomplicated one – a simple two note 'chiff chaff, chiff chaff'. But what it heralds is the onset of the lighter nights, warmer weather and all the amazing natural wonders that spring beckons in!

Although a few chiffchaff now over-winter here – a result of warming winters – most are still migratory birds, and this unassuming little brown warbler has navigated an incredible journey from southern Europe, some from north Africa, to come here to breed.

Making their first appearance

They begin to appear from late March, usually in wooded areas, possibly your garden if you have trees. Despite the long journey, they need to be in the best condition possible to meet a mate and breed over the coming months, so food is immediately an important consideration. They eat insects and invertebrates, so having a garden brimming with bug life like caterpillars, flies, gnats and midges will provide some vital food sources for chiffchaffs along with a range of other insectivores this spring.

The next few weeks are a good time to try and catch a glimpse of them, before the trees are back in leaf and bird-spotting becomes a little trickier! Chiffchaffs are small birds – around the same size as a blue tit – olive-brown above, pale yellow below, with a stripe above their eye. Dark legs distinguish them from the very similar willow warbler, along with their very different songs.

Once paired, chiffchaffs like most other birds this season will be really busy building their nests. Theirs are often quite close to the ground in dense undergrowth, particularly bramble bushes.

Frequently asked questions

Q I read somewhere that it is illegal to trim garden hedges during the nesting season – is that true?

A The act of trimming itself is not illegal, but the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 forbids the removal and/or destruction of active nests. It is also illegal to disturb Schedule One species (these are birds with additional protections) when they're actively nesting or have dependent young. As disturbance of any nesting bird should be avoided at all costs, we advise against doing any hedge-trimming from February to September.

Q I know garden ponds are great for wildlife but my garden is tiny – I can't fit one in. What else can I do to help?

A Even a tiny pond in an old washing-up bowl has a multitude of benefits and fits into the smallest spaces! Take a look at our website for more information about ponds and wildlife-friendly gardens: www.rspb.org.uk

For more information about chiffchaff or any other spring migrants now appearing in our gardens, go to www.rspb.org.uk

© Andy Hay RSPB Images

You can recycle an old sink – even a washing up bowl - to make a great garden pond feature

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You can think, plan and plant big even in smaller spaces

Make the most of a small garden with careful planting and good design. **Sue Bradley** explains how

A small outside space is no barrier to big ambitions. Indeed, it is the perfect canvas for creativity and finer details of foliage, flowers, or fabulous fragrance, which might get swamped in a larger setting.

Great gardens are underpinned by good design and it's even possible to make small spaces appear larger by incorporating geometric shapes such as circles, or painting structures like sheds and fences black to encourage them to 'disappear' behind planting.

Less is definitely more, and a reduced range of hard landscaping materials and paint colours contributes to a sense of unity, but you can make every inch count by optimising every planting opportunity.

Look up to vertical growing opportunities

Walls and fencing are a great support for climbing plants that provide additional colour and interest. Think about using pleached trees, described by some as 'hedges on stilts', which are ideal for screening, look attractive and provide plenty of room for underplanting.

Vertical planting helps to maximise growing space and looks lovely

Hanging and wall baskets create opportunities for colour and texture, while mirrors can create attractive reflections, although take care with their positioning and the possibility of bird strikes.

Think longer-lasting colour

Look for good value plants in terms of a long season of interest and beautiful colours, textures and fragrances. Consider interesting combinations or a theme, such as calming white or vibrant tropical for a feeling of unity.

Fine details are more easily noticed and appreciated in compact spaces, which makes them perfect for collections of miniature plants such as alpines and succulents. Even the smallest gardens have space for eye-catching features.

There's always room for some edibles

Don't rule out growing fruit and veg - indeed, the cottage gardens of days gone by often combined the two with attractive results.

Have fun and play with small space features that you love

Trees can also find a home

If selecting trees, think of their eventual size and the amount of shade they cast, as well as the value they bring in terms of structure, foliage, blossom and fruit.

Other features that are fun and fruitful

All gardens benefit from water features, which contribute reflective qualities, are valuable to wildlife and can enhance the overall ambience with gentle trickling sounds. Look for space-savvy vertical designs, or create a small pond using an old metal tub or half barrel.

Sculptures can enhance a small garden, although it's often best to pick one fantastic piece rather than pull the eyes in all directions with too many.

Other things to consider include seating and lighting, which can be used to highlight structural plants and extend time spent outside.

Small gardens may be short on space, but this does not mean they can't be big in terms of potential. The only limit is the size of our imagination.

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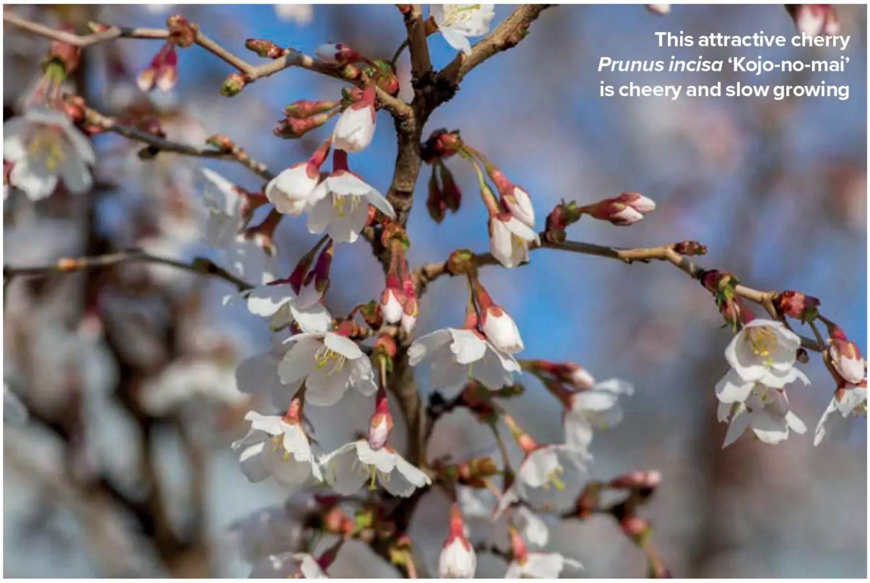
Best trees for smaller spaces

Trees bring vertical interest and welcome shade and in a small space they need to be especially hardworking, producing foliage that delivers pleasing colour throughout the seasons and, if possible, flowers and even fruit. It’s also worth considering shapes of frames and textures of bark, both of which become increasingly important over the winter months.


This attractive cherry *Prunus incisa* ‘Kojo-no-mai’ is cheery and slow growing

Year round interest making the best use of space with *Amalanchier laevis*

Compact and colourful crab apple *Malus* ‘Butterball’

Chinese dogwood, *Cornus kousa* can be grown as a large shrub or small tree

A showstopper of a willow that can be kept contained *Salix integra* ‘Hakuro-Nishiki’

Prunus incisa ‘Kojo-no-mai’

This slow-growing flowering cherry has attractive ‘zig-zag’ branches and rewards growers with a beautiful display of insect-friendly hanging blush-white blooms in April and red or copper leaves in autumn. It can be grown in the ground or in containers on a patio.

Height: 1.5-2.5m (4.9-8ft)
Width: 1.5-2.5m (4.9-8ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or part shade in west, east or south-facing spot
Soil pH: All

Amalanchier laevis

Smooth serviceberry attracts attention throughout the year, with coppery pink emerging foliage in spring turning mid-green and then yellow flushed with red by autumn, along with clusters of starry white flowers followed by edible sweet blue-back fruits in summer.

Prune this upright shrub/small tree in late winter to reduce its height. Look for cultivars such as ‘Snowflakes’.

Height: 4-8m (14-26ft)
Width: 4-8m (14-26ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or part shade in any aspect
Soil pH: Acid or neutral

Malus ‘Butterball’

The crab apple is a great value tree, producing interest throughout the seasons. Enjoy blossom and emerging foliage in spring, followed by pretty fruits in autumn that can remain in place well into the colder months.

‘Butterball’ is a small, spreading cultivar that produces pink buds that open into white flowers with a blush, followed by fruits that are yellow-orange flushed with red.

Height: 4-8m (14-26ft)
Width: 4-8m (14-26ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun, any aspect
Soil pH: All

Salix integra ‘Hakuro-Nishiki’

Flamingo willow is a real showstopper, with branches that droop slightly at the tips. The narrow leaves emerge pink in spring and turn variegated shades of pink, creamy white and green before turning a more green hue as the summer wears on. Enjoy yellow catkins in spring while the stems, especially the younger ones, turn an orange-red in autumn. Grow as a small tree or a shrub.

Height: 1.5-2.5m (4.9-8ft)
Width: 1.5-2.5m (4.9-8ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun, any aspect
Soil pH: All

Cornus kousa

Chinese dogwood can be a large shrub or a small tree. Its small green flowers surrounded by large creamy white bracts appear in early summer and are followed by deep pink, strawberry-like fruits that look attractive and are sweet in flavour.

Height: Up to 7m (23ft)
Width: 4-8m (13-26ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, any aspect
Soil pH: All

Best flowers for smaller spaces

A little goes a long way in a small garden, which means that flowers offering interesting colours and shapes and beautiful foliage can be appreciated for their individual qualities, as well as mass appeal. Seek out perfumed blooms, the fragrance from which is amplified when contained within a small space, and species that appeal to wildlife.

Lavandula angustifolia 'Hidcote'

Lavender is the ultimate plant for a small space, rewarding growers with colour and fragrance and attracting the likes of bees and butterflies. 'Hidcote' is a more compact version of this drought-resistant evergreen shrub, with spikes of violet-purple flowers.
Height: 0.5m (1.6ft)
Width: Up to 1m (3.2ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun, south, east or west-facing aspect
Soil pH: All

Great for bees and butterflies and small space gardening, *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote'

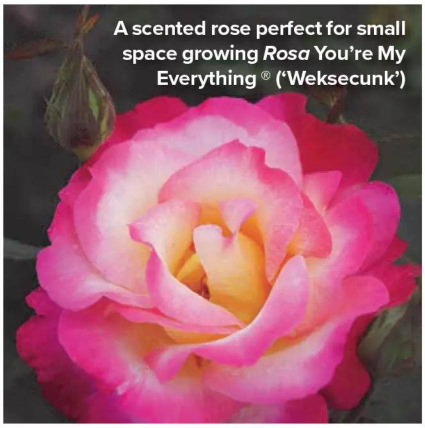
Thunbergia alata

Black-eyed Susan is an obliging annual climber that will festoon a trellis with its distinctive orange flowers with a dark centre and heart-shaped or oval foliage. Grow from seeds in spring for a satisfying summer display. This plant likes moist but well-drained soil.
Height: 1.5-2.5m (4.9- 8ft)
Width: 0.5-1m (1.6- 3.2ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun, south or west-facing aspect
Soil pH: All

Great for vertical growing blooms, *Thunbergia alata* (Black-eyed Susan)

Rosa You're My Everything ® ('Weksecunk')

No garden is complete without a rose, especially one that's scented, but in a smaller space it's a good idea to look for more compact types that won't try and take over. You're My Everything, the Rose of the Year 2025, draws the eye with its frilly petals that gradually darken to a deeper pink while foliage emerges as red and matures to dark green. Grow in containers or a border.
Height: 75-90cm (30-35ins)
Width: 60cm (24ins)
Growing conditions: Full sun or spot that gets at least four hours of sun a day
Soil pH: All


A scented rose perfect for small space growing *Rosa* You're My Everything ® ('Weksecunk')

© Roses UK

Astrantia major Gill Richardson Group

Masterwort is well-suited to sunny or more shady spots in the garden.

The Gill Richardson Group offers tall and erect crimson flowers surrounded by red bracts above attractive dark green leaves. Grow in moist soils.
Height: 50cm-1m (20in-3ft)
Width: 50cm-1m (20in-3ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, all aspects
Soil pH: All

Gorgeous 'pincushions' of pretty blooms *Astrantia major* Gill Richardson Group

Best water features for smaller spaces

Water brings reflective qualities to the garden and has great value for wildlife. Some water features create a gentle sound too.

Create space for a small water feature to boost biodiversity and enjoyment of your garden

Standing waterfall

Slim but eye-catching, a standing waterfall doesn't take up a huge amount of space but brings sound and reflective qualities to a small garden. They're made in a variety of materials, including corten steel and stainless steel, and some are even fitted with LED lights.

Small ponds

Dig a small pond, or even create a watery space using an old metal tub, half barrel or plastic trug. Place a few stones in the bottom and possibly even add a few pond plants to increase its appeal for wildlife.

Fountain

Enhance the ambience of a small garden with a fountain, which will bring a soothing comforting sound to an outside space. Buy a ready-made feature or make your own.

The soothing joy of a small garden fountain

Best foliage plants for smaller spaces

Hosta 'Paul's Glory'
From the moment their leaves emerge in spring until late autumn, hostas offer beautiful foliage over many months and many have great flowers. They can be grown in borders or in pots, with the latter offering the advantage of being portable as and when a dull corner requires an injection of vibrancy. Choose variegated cultivars such as 'Paul's Glory' with its golden leaves that brighten to white-gold for sunny areas, while bluer types are great for light shade.
Height: 50cm-1m (20in-3ft)
Width: 50cm-1m (20in-3ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, west or east facing
Soil pH: All

Athyrium niponicum var. _pictum_
There are many ferns to bring texture and form to shadier parts of a small garden, beginning as tight scrolls and opening into feathery fronds.

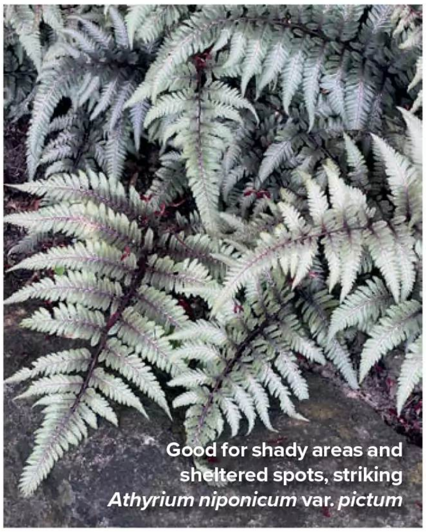
Painted lady fern is among the most memorable with its beautiful combination of grey and red-purple. It prefers moist soils and sheltered spots.
Height: 10-50cm (4-20ins)
Width: 10-50cm (4-20ins)
Growing conditions: Full or partial shade, north or east facing
Soil pH: Acid or neutral

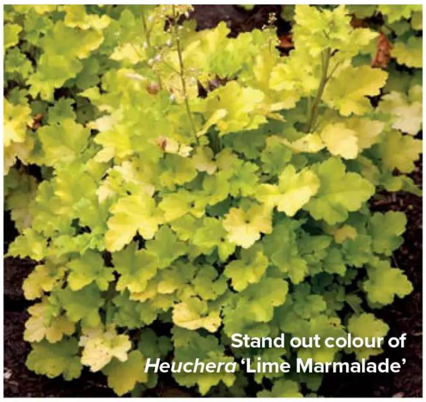
Heuchera 'Lime Marmalade'
Chartreuse and lime green hues really stand out in a small space, which makes 'Lime Marmalade' a great choice from among the many colours of heuchera.

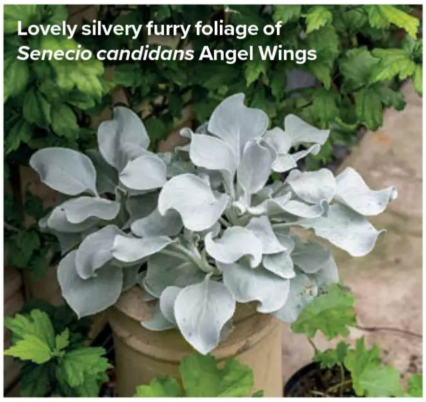
This particular cultivar forms mounds of ruffled leaves, with small white flowers on green stems in summer. Grow this semi-evergreen in borders or containers and, especially with the latter, monitor for signs of vine weevils.
Height: 10-50cm (4-20ins)
Width: 10-50cm (4-20ins)
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, any aspect
Soil pH: neutral

Senecio candidans Angel Wings ('Senaw')
A favourite with the silvery furry foliage of *Senecio candidans* Angel Wings is lovely to touch and looks great. This evergreen perennial forms clumps of attractive leaves and produces clusters of small yellow flowers in summer. Grow in borders or in pots.
Height: 40cm (16ins)
Width: 40cm (16ins)
Growing conditions: Full sun, south or west-facing
Soil pH: All

Hostas provide beautiful foliage over many months


Good for shady areas and sheltered spots, striking *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum*


Stand out colour of *Heuchera* 'Lime Marmalade'

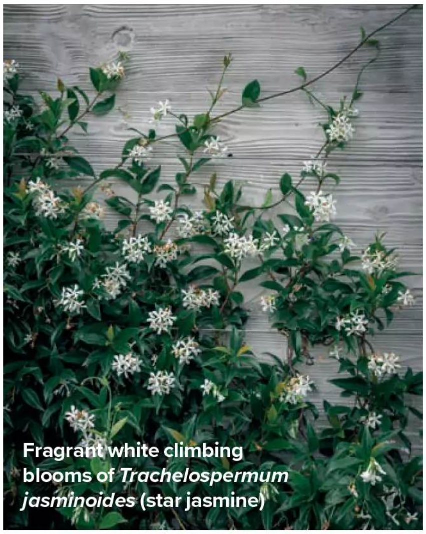

Lovely silvery furry foliage of *Senecio candidans* Angel Wings

Best climbers for smaller spaces

Climbing plants add texture and colour to bare walls, extending the vertical space within a small garden. When choosing what to plant, think about the type of surface it will be growing against and whether it will need some kind or support or be self-supporting, and how easy it will be to cut back.

Trachelospermum jasminoides
Choose star jasmine for a year-round curtain of oval leaves, which are green for most of the year but can turn deep bronze-red in winter, punctuated with a constellation of fragrant white flowers during the summer and berries in autumn.
Height: 8-12m (26-39ft)
Width: 4-8m (14-26ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, with a south, west or east-facing aspect.
Soil pH: All

Hydrangea petiolaris
Climbing hydrangeas will happily cling to sheltered walls and fences in any part of the garden, including north-facing ones. It produces a healthy covering of green leaves in spring and summer, which go on to turn yellow in autumn, and large mopheads of white flowers appear in summer.
Height: 12m (39ft) and above
Width: 4-8m (14-26ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, any aspect
Soil pH: All


Fragrant white climbing blooms of *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (star jasmine)

Honeysuckle

Attractive, wildlife-friendly flowers and a delicious fragrance that's especially noticeable on warm summer nights combine to make honeysuckle a delight.

It scrambles over fencing, trellis or other supports and there's a wide range from which to choose, including compact cultivars such as *Lonicera periclymenum* 'Chic et Choc' and later-flowering types like 'Serotina'.

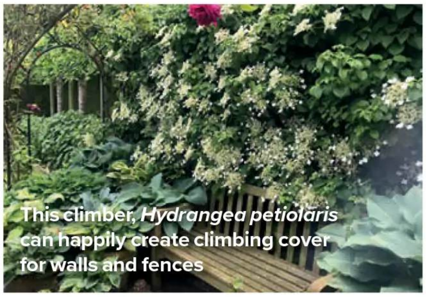
Height: Varies – 4-8m (13-26ft) if unpruned
Width: Varies – up to 1-1.5m (3-5ft) if unpruned
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, any aspect
Soil pH: All

Clematis texensis Princess Kate ('Zoprika')

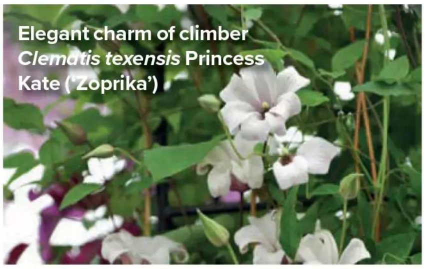
Gardeners are spoilt for choice when choosing between the different species of clematis. Princess Kate is an elegant texensis cultivar with smaller upright bell-shaped flowers that are white inside and purple on the reverse.

This group 3 clematis blooms from June to September and its flowers can be used in vases too. Prune hard at the end of winter.

Height: Varies – 3.5m (11ft)
Width: Varies – 1m (3ft)
Growing conditions: Full sun or partial shade, south or west-facing aspect
Soil pH: Alkaline or neutral


This climber, *Hydrangea petiolaris* can happily create climbing cover for walls and fences

Wildlife-friendly and simply sweet and wonderful honeysuckle


Elegant charm of climber *Clematis texensis* Princess Kate ('Zoprika')

Design tips

How to make a smaller garden look bigger

Back to black
Black has a magical ability to fade into the background, allowing planting to shine out. Use this colour to reduce the impact of fencing and things like sheds

Stick to a limited colour palette and materials
Choose a colour for various pieces of woodwork to create a harmonious feeling. Adopt a similar policy for landscaping materials, such as stone chippings or slate pieces.

Choose a theme
Bring a sense of unity to a small garden by having a theme: this could be based on a colour, such as calming white, or a group of plants suggestive of a tropical climate.

Capitalise on planting opportunities
Use hanging baskets and wall planters to bring more plants into the garden, making the most of all available spaces.

Pathways
It's difficult to avoid having pathways in gardens, but they don't need to take up a lot of space: stepping stones set into lawns keep feet dry without taking up too much room.

Seating
Look for seating that doesn't dominate a garden, such as this attractive metal bench. Small bistro tables and chairs are also useful as they can be moved to catch the sun.

Round lawns and beds
Circles create a feeling of space in a small garden, pushing the eye to the outer limits of the plot. Use them for lawns or flower beds.

Add a mirror
A reflective surface can add to a feeling of space, but position them carefully to avoid bird casualties.

SUPPLIERS
C&K Jones: *www.jonestherose.co.uk*
Sarah Raven: *www.sarahraven.com*
Crocus: *www.crocus.co.uk*
Majestic Trees: *www.majestictrees.co.uk*
Suttons: *www.suttons.co.uk*
Thompson & Morgan: *www.thompson-morgan.com*

PHOTO: JULIE SKELTON

MASTERCLASS

With **Julia Boulton,** Beth Chatto's granddaughter and chief custodian of the world-famous gardens, and her team

The Beth Chatto Water Gardens in June with *Primula bulleyana* in full bloom

How to grow perfect primulas

Enjoy the endless charms of these pretty, vibrant blooms

Primulas are broadly categorized in two main groups. The first includes candelabra primulas which are larger and have whorls of brightly coloured flowers often in orange, pink and red. Candelabra primroses look their best when grown near water and in large drifts, whether focused on a single colour or planted as a mixed blend. The second group consists of our native oxlips, cowslips and primroses, which are more subtle, smaller and usually with yellow flowers, perfect in a woodland setting.

Primulas typically thrive in dappled shade and moist soil, although native primroses can handle drier spots. Most primulas have a device to enable cross-pollination between plants. Flowers on some plants will have the style longer than the stamens (pin), whilst others have the style shorter than the stamens, (thrum). These allow successful pollination to occur only with flowers of different style lengths.

Wildlife credentials with our Dr Chris Gibson

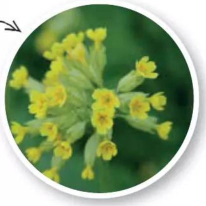
All primula flowers are an important spring and early summer resource for visiting pollinators, including bees, bee-flies and butterflies such as brimstone. However, given their propensity to hybridise, it would be preferable to plant them outside of a pollinator flight range (say 200m (656ft) from native populations of rarer species such as oxlip.

Goes well with:

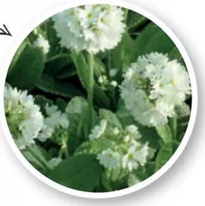
- Alchemilla
- Narcissus
- *Lobelia pedunculata* (syn. *Pratia pedunculata*)
- Bleeding heart *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*
- Ferns

All images © Beth Chatto Gardens

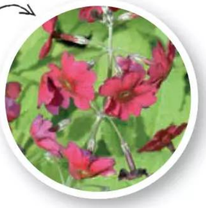
Some of our favourites:



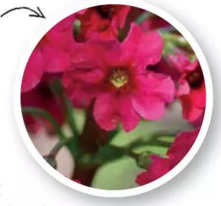
Primula veris
A native perennial with rosettes of mid green leaves. Stout stems bear clusters of nodding pale to deep yellow, fragrant flowers in spring. Needs a moist, but not waterlogged soil in semi-shade. Semi-evergreen. Height and spread: 20x15cm (8x6in).



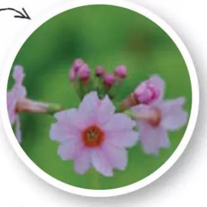
Primula denticulata var. *alba*
A beautiful form with white flowers, yellow eyes with luscious pale green leaves. Height and spread: 30cm (12in).



Primula pulverulenta
Flowers after *Primula japonica*. Crinkled green leaves, tall, slender mealy-white stems carry wine-red flowers. Height and spread: 70x30cm (27x12in).



Primula japonica 'Miller's Crimson'
An early-flowering candelabra primula requiring moist soil. Large rosettes of foliage produce thick stems with up to six whorls of crimson flowers. Will seed about once settled. Height and spread: 60x30cm (24x12in).



Primula japonica 'Apple Blossom'
A perennial with large pale green leaves. Stout stems with tiers of pale pink flowers in late spring and early summer. Ideal for a cool damp spot in sun or part shade. Height and spread: 60x45cm (24x18in).

You can find out more about these world-famous gardens and these primulas at **www.bethchatto.co.uk**

THE NATURAL FORAGER'S GARDEN

With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing *AG* columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**

How to grow great globe artichokes and sensational sea kale and use seaweed feed

Anne explains why maritime edibles can help enhance your garden

Anne explains how to reliably grow globe artichokes in your garden

I'm lucky to live near the coast in East Devon and this issue my pages are taking a seaside theme. At nearby Branscombe and Weston in the 1800s, folk used to carve vegetable plots known as 'plats' from flattish sections of cliff. Here, early potatoes and other crops benefited from the microclimate and abundance of seaweed as a natural fertiliser and soil improver.

Shoreline plants such as viper's bugloss and sea spinach are a resilient and fascinating bunch. My favourite is sea kale, whose clumps of wavy, blue-green leaves and white summer flowers are a familiar sight above the high tide mark. Veg growers can send off for plants, whose forced young shoots are crunchy and delicious with cheese. These are also good choices for dry and gravel gardens.

Globe artichoke is another perennial whose shimmering, silvery foliage looks as good in a flower border as it does on the veg plot. Left on, their edible flower buds eventually open to reveal thistle-like flower heads of great interest to bees.

Unopened buds are cut and boiled until the tough scales pull away easily, one-by-one. Their bases are dipped in a tasty dressing or peppery melted butter and then you draw the soft nutty flesh away with your teeth until all that's left is a pile of nibbled scales and a heart. Remove the fuzzy 'choke' from the top of the heart and the final treat is revealed.

For me, they bring to mind sizzling hot sun, outdoor veg markets and long slow lunches. With their origins in Mediterranean regions, these artichokes tend to be short-lived, especially on heavier soils where ageing crowns are prone to rotting during cold, wet winters. The solution is to propagate your best plants long before this happens, or risk facing a summer without them.

How to grow... globe artichokes

The globe artichoke (*Cynara cardunculus* Scolymus Group) is a perennial member of the daisy family, whose silvery foliage often persists through mild winters but dies back when faced with colder weather. Easy to grow, they are usually untroubled by pests and diseases.

My last plant was originally raised from seed and grew to impressive proportions, yielding huge prickly globes great for sharing. They'd be immersed in water to loosen any greenfly or earwigs lurking amongst the leafy scales and were so vast they'd have to be boiled in our cauldron-like pan usually reserved for marmalade making and the steaming of Christmas puddings. Now this plant has died and we need to re-stock.

Globe artichokes grow well from seed and this is an excellent way of raising a good number cheaply. Unless they are F1 hybrids, a packet often gives variable results but that's no bad thing, especially as some will prove hardier than others.

Sow these now in a wide, shallow pot in warmth and space the seeds widely, as you'll soon be rewarded by large, silvery seedlings. As soon as they have germinated, place them in a cool but frost-free greenhouse and then transplant one per 10cm (4in) pot.

Next, harden off by placing them in frames or outdoors to feel the weather and then plant into generous border gaps or set 45cm (18in) apart in rows 1m (3ft) apart. They like good, deep well-nourished and well-draining soil. Young rooted plants are also available to buy.

Those whose existing artichokes are returning to growth can propagate by suckers in April, or when leaves reach 10in (25cm) long. Scuffle soil from around the base and use a sharp knife to cut the shoots away with a 'heel' of older growth and if possible, roots attached. An old veg-growing book of mine recommends setting these in trios with 23cm (9in) between the plants. They could also be planted singly, or into deep pots.

There is also advice to protect crowns from winter weather by trimming back longer leaves and placing 'loose litter' (bracken, twigs, shreddings) around the plants but not over crowns. Whole plants can be lifted, divided and replanted in April or November, but I haven't tried this.

These delicious edibles are generally untroubled by pest and disease

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Try these... Globe artichokes varieties to grow from seed

'Imperial Star'
Expect productive plants delivering plenty of rounded green flower heads. The flesh of scale bases and hearts is sweetly flavoured. *www.thompson-morgan.com*

'Tavor'
This productive and improved selection of popular 'Green Globe' is said to have good winter cold tolerance. *www.victoriananursery.co.uk*

'Violetto Precoce'
Tinged with violet-purple, plump flower buds appear early and have a delicate flavour. Apparently they are a classic of Rome and should be savoured on visits there. *www.seedsofitaly.com*

Choose from green and purple-headed varieties Inset: **Left on the plants, buds burst into bloom and are attractive to bees**

Seaweed

Beaches come under the care of organisations (perhaps the National Trust or local authority) or are privately owned, so always check that collecting seaweed is allowed. This should always be loose and thrown ashore by a storm and never taken from rocks or the sea bed. It is not necessary to rinse or wash the seaweed, simply spread it over a bed to gradually rot and dry.

As well as containing plant nutrients including trace elements and growth stimulants, seaweed improves soil texture. For those inland, there are plenty of products derived from seaweed for adding to soil or applying as liquid feeds.

Anne gathering loose seaweed washed up after a storm for spreading straight onto veg beds

Sea kale grows wild on the seashore but plants can provide a useful edible addition to gardens

©Shutterstock

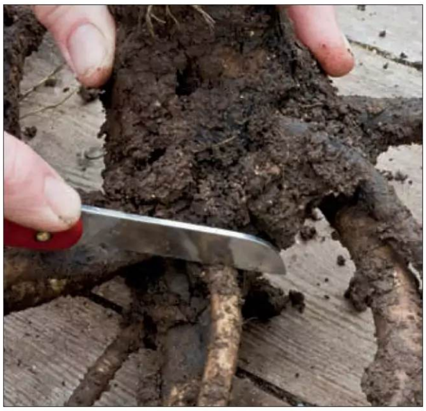
Sea kale

Those who already grow sea kale (*Crambe maritima*) for cropping will have covered their plants with upturned buckets or special 'forcers' from late January to February. Now the covers are lifted with the anticipation of cutting tender, blanched shoots at 10-20cm (4-8in) long. This continues until the end of April, when the covers are removed, allowing plants to relax into normal growth.

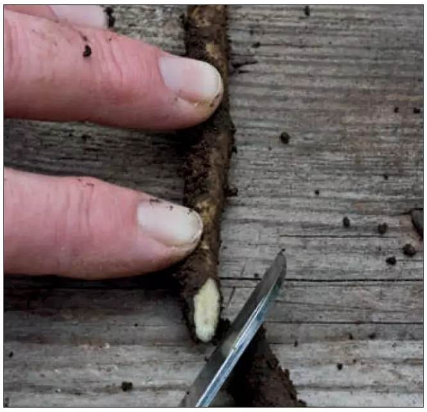
These are handsome herbaceous perennials reaching a maximum height and spread of around 75cm (30in), but often less. A bed of sea kale is started by sowing seeds, ordering 'thongs' (root sections) or young potted plants. The latter may be more expensive but once established, yield plenty of root cuttings, taken by lifting a plant in autumn and cutting away fleshy side roots.

Select a pot perhaps 5in (13cm) across and trim the roots by cutting straight at the top and slantwise at the base so that when several are bundled and tied together, they'll fit vertically in the pot of sharp sand, with tops just beneath the surface. Keep under unheated glass in a frame or greenhouse and when robust new growth shows, separate and pot carefully. Sea kale needs a good but well-drained soil, so raise or mound a bed where soil is heavy. Plants are best set out in late March, 60cm (24in) apart, with crowns 5cm (2in) deep. Remove flower buds, thin growth buds to keep a few of the strongest and force from their second year.

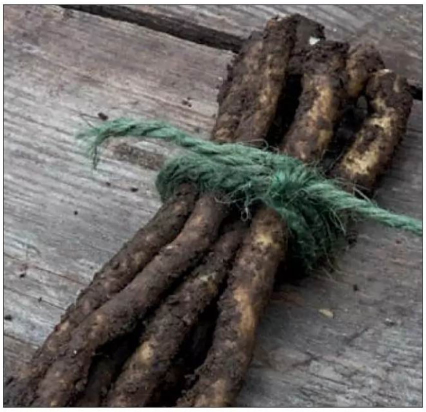
Step by step How to make more seakale plants for free



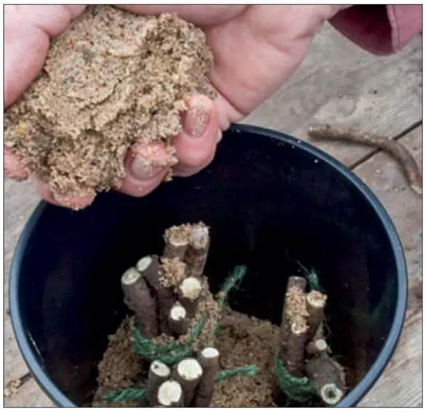
1 To propagate seakale, lift plants in autumn and look for long, fleshy roots



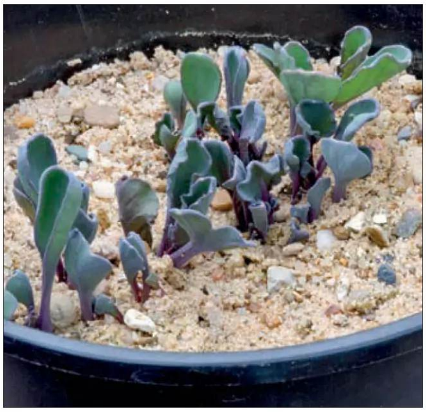
2 Trim the roots to a size that will fit vertically in a 5in (13cm) pot cutting straight at the top and slanting at the base



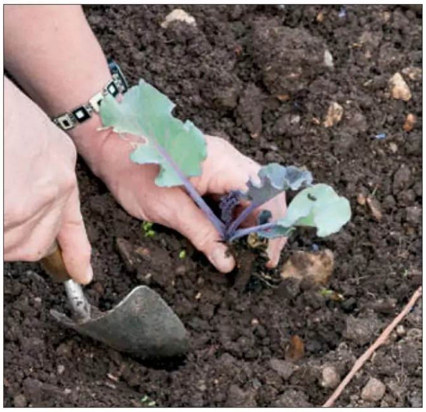
3 Tie the prepared cuttings in a bundle, each one the right way round to avoid confusion!



1 Set the bundle of cuttings in the pot with sand around them



2 Each will burst into growth and when roots are strong, are potted separately



3 When established in their pots, plant out in sun and well-drained soil

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How to grow the perfect pollinator-friendly plant pots

Mike Palmer explains how to help attract a diverse range of pollinators into your garden

In 1955, well before I was even a spark in my parents' eyes, Pete Seeger wrote the folk-style song *Where have all the flowers gone,* popularised by artists including Marlene Dietrich and Peter, Paul and Mary.

In 2024, gardeners were asking a related question - where have all the pollinators gone? There was a distinct drop in the number of butterflies, moths and other pollinators last year, especially those reliant upon particular plant species or environments for sustenance and nesting sites. Contributing factors to the decline in some pollinator populations include climate change, with its erratic worldwide weather patterns and the destruction of natural wildlife habitats, leading to a reduction in the quantity and quality of pollinator-attracting plants.

Pollinators feed upon the pollen and nectar held within flowers for sustenance, consequentially transferring pollen from one plant to another as they go, which, in turn, facilitates the crucial reproduction of plants. And, without plants, our beautifully complex planet would be without fruits, vegetables and seeds, leading to a subsequent decline in food.

Thankfully, as passionate gardeners irrespective of the size of our gardens, we can help. Pots and containers crowded together on a patio or balcony, or perhaps a large focal point container at the end of a pathway, can be planted with a treasure trove of pollinator-attracting trinkets, which will be adored by bees, butterflies, hoverflies, moths, and, of course, you.

© Shutterstock

Above: Irrespective of the size of our gardens, pots are the perfect way to encourage a diverse range of pollinators such as hoverflies

All images unless otherwise credited: Mike Palmer

Thrillers, fillers and spillers make an eye-catching container combination for pollinators

Mike's top 5 tips for planting containers

Before we take a closer look at the plants trending in the pollinator pop-parade, let me share with you my tips for planting a container.

1 Decide where your container will be sited

As always, our mantra of 'right plant, right place' must be a key consideration. Container plantings are usually more permanent, so a good soil-based compost will be beneficial, or an ericaceous compost for acid-loving plants like azaleas and camellias.

Gauge roughly how much sun the container will get and choose plants that will thrive in that specific location.

2 Incorporate three types of plants to include in the mix:

The 'thriller'

Choose a plant which acts as a dramatic focal point for the container – something that has a 'wow factor'. In a larger container that might be a small tree; a small shrub in a medium sized container; or a stunning perennial in a small container. Select a plant which gives real bang for your buck with a long season of interest.

The 'spiller'

Soften the sides of your container and maximise pollinator power with a plant that tumbles or trails. These plants also add the perfect counterfoil to the 'thriller' plant, providing an aesthetic, contrasting beauty.

The 'filler'

A filler, or fillers, do what they say on the tin, filling the space between thriller and spiller. They might be a grouping of smaller, mounding plants of the same or different species or perhaps possess complementary or contrasting colours.

3 Create year-round interest by underplanting spring flowering bulbs:

A selection of spring-flowering bulbs will add early season colour and interest to your container. If you still have spring bulbs in containers, these can be set aside once they've finished flowering ready to be incorporated into your new pollinator pot.

4 Use a combination of flower shapes and colours:

Like us fussy gardeners (or is that just me?), pollinators have favourite colours, flowers, and indeed flower shapes. Tubular flowers, like penstemons, are much-loved by bees and butterflies with long proboscises, while moths favour the spur-shaped flowers of aquilegias. The flat, open flowers of daisies, heleniums and rudbeckias, including the tiny blooms on buddleia racemes, are a magnet for bees, butterflies and beetles.

A glorious spectrum of colours will also help to attract a diverse range of pollinators, with bees yearning for yellow, blue and purple blooms (I must have been a bee in a previous life) and butterflies preferring pink, orange and red.

5 Use plants with different textures:

Support our pollinator pals further by considering plants with differing textures. Bees are drawn to plants with soft, broad petals that offer secure surfaces for landing and feasting, while butterflies are partial to smooth, flat surfaces.

Mike has an impressive collection of potted hostas which Mike loves, but not as much as the bees!

Use a variety of flower shapes to bring in bees, butterflies and other beneficial pollinators such as penstemon (above) and achillea (inset)

Keep plants in pots happy and healthy with regular watering and feeding

Container maintenance

Unlike their border-bound relations, plants in containers are reliant upon us for food and water. Keep your container plants fed and watered in accordance with their specific needs, especially in warmer, dare I say, even hotter weather.

And don't cancel that week away in the Caribbean, or Cleethorpes, just because you're worried about your containers drying out. Grouping them together, where possible, will provide a snug, humid microclimate and make it easier for your willing volunteer to feed and water them. Irrigation kits are also widely available and easy to install.

Pollinator-friendly plants

I've purposely selected dwarf and smaller varieties for all my recommendations below, but if you're hoping to attract pollinators in a large, show-stopping container, most of the plants selected are available as larger varieties.

Thriller trees

For a larger container, approximately 90x90cm (3x3ft) or bigger, consider fruit trees grown on a dwarfing

Bees adore the nectar and pollen-rich flowers of apple, pear and cherry trees

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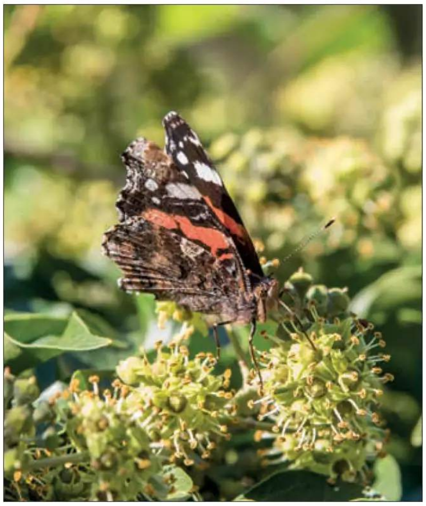
Common ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a pollinator favourite and softens the edges of containers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rootstock which restricts the vigour of the tree. Apple, pear and cherry trees entice bees and butterflies with nectar-rich blooms, and fruit for hard-working gardeners. Delicate Japanese maples, or stunning standard lilacs like *Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin' attract pollinators with their respective flowers. '

Pollinators also adore the abundant pollen and nectar-rich blossom of dwarf crab apple trees, with the subsequent clusters of colourful fruits in autumn being a sight to behold.

Thriller shrubs

Butterfly-attracting buddleias, mock oranges and hydrangeas and are all available in dwarf varieties. *Buddleja davidii* Buzz Hot Raspberry ('Tobud1202') (Buzz Series) is a perfectly petite pollinator plant, or consider exquisite *Philadelphus* Petite Perfume Pink ('P1'). The dwarf blueberry *Vaccinium* 'Sunshine Blue' will keep you in blueberries and have pollinators queuing around the block paving.

Thriller perennials

Life is too short not to be thrilled, so choose plants that both you and your eager pollinator visitors will adore.

Some of my favourites include *Penstemon* 'Hidcote Pink', *Achillea* Little Moonshine (Acbz0002'), *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Little Goldstar' and *Hylotelephium spectabile* 'Brilliant' (formerly known as sedum).

Filler perennials and annuals

Lavender 'Munstead', *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walkers Low', *Erigeron karvinskianus* and pot marigolds (*Calendula sp*) make excellent fillers.

Spillers

Ivy, nasturtium, petunia and sweet alyssum.

Bulbs

Dwarf narcissus, snowdrop and crocus are adored by early pollinators.

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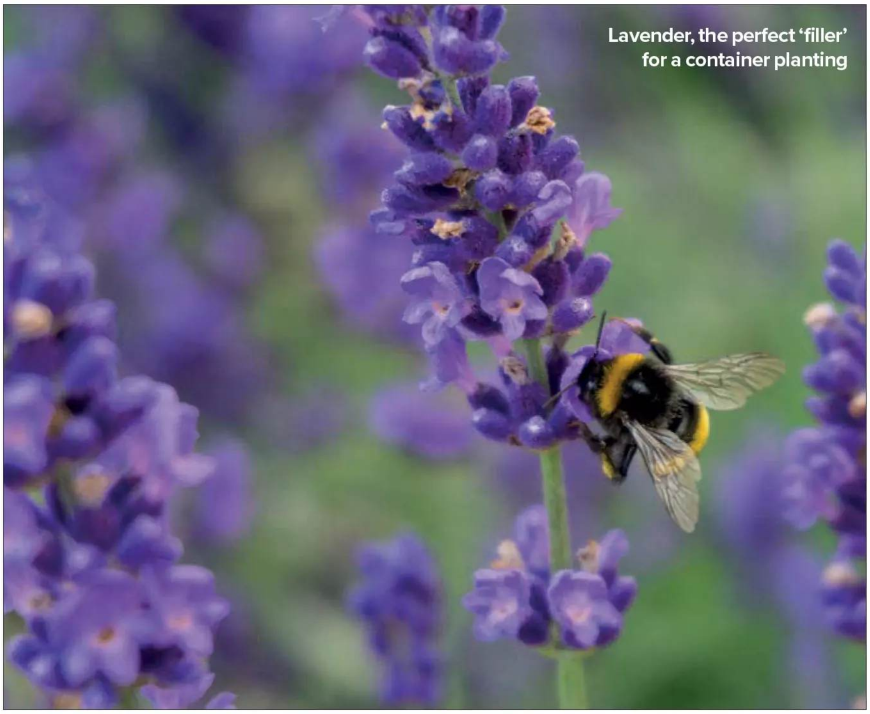
Above: *Hylotelephium spectabile* (formerly sedum) is a magnet for many pollinators


Lavender, the perfect 'filler' for a container planting

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Rosie's resilient gardening

More money-saving spring projects

Rosie Irving shares more inspiring reuse and recycle inspiration

This is the start of the busy time of year in the gardening calendar. Lots of seed sowing, planting summer-flowering bulbs and hardening off seedlings to name but a few activities.

I've been busy checking my garden tools, making new raised beds and sowing lots of seeds, so thought I'd pass on to you more thrifty ways of getting ready for the forthcoming season.

Weaving your own raised beds is a good workout for body and mind.

All images unless otherwise credited: Rosie Irving

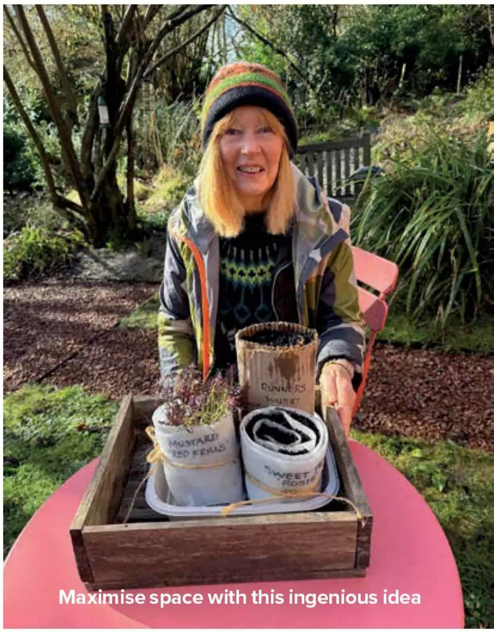
Seed snail

What you'll need

- Packaging material such as cardboard, bubble wrap or polythene foam
- Seed compost or well-rotted leaf mould
- Twine or tape or elastic bands
- Shallow plastic tray

A 2020 Royal Horticultural Society science project revealed that sowing seeds in a garden bare of plants could reduce stress levels by as much as the equivalent of eight weekly mindfulness sessions.

With that in mind, here's a lovely way of sowing seeds using recycled materials and saving on space and compost, with the added bonus of being able to cut out the potting up stage.

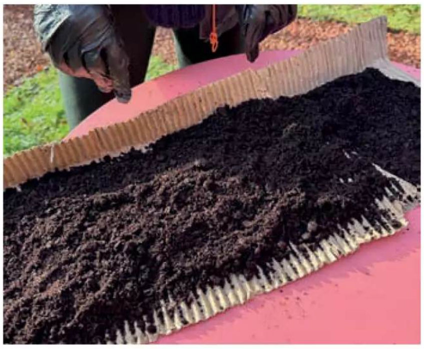

Maximise space with this ingenious idea

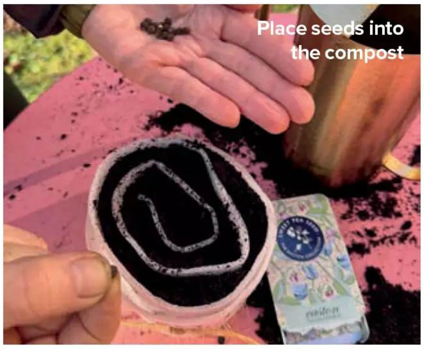
How to make it

- Cut a strip of the packaging material to your desired length and width, generally 10cm (4in) width for small seeds, 20cm (8in) for large ones. The length will depend on how many seeds you plan to sow.
- Mix your compost/leaf mould with water (approx. 3 parts compost/leaf mould to 1 part water) creating a similar consistency to a thick batter mix.
- Lay the packaging material out on a flat surface and spread the compost mix along its length about 2.5cm (1in) thick leaving a 5cm (2in) gap at either end.
- Carefully roll the compost filled length of packaging material and secure the end with either tape or tie with twine or an elastic band.
- Stand the seed snail upright and gently firm the top of the compost mix.
- Sow seeds into the snail following seed packet sowing instructions and gently water.
- Stand the seed snail in a plastic tray and place it somewhere warm and light.
- Placing a plastic bag over the top of the seed snail may speed up germination, but if used, remove once seed leaves appear.

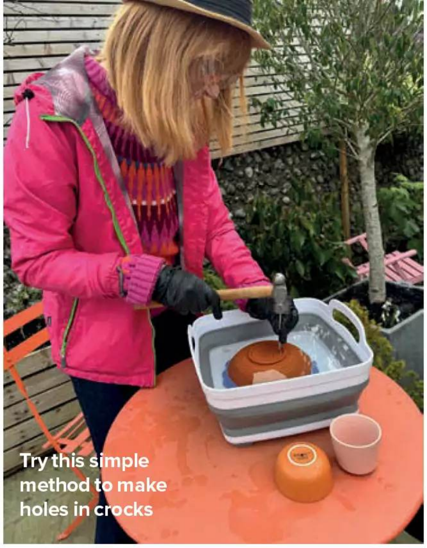
Top tips

- I turned the bottom of the packaging material over before filling with compost but, if using impermeable packaging, be aware this prevents watering from the bottom.
- If the leaves on some of the seedlings start to turn yellow, gently unroll the seed snail and add a little more moistened compost.
- If seedlings seem overcrowded as they grow, rather than thin, gently unroll the seed snail and remove the weaker looking ones which can either be potted up or placed in a new seed snail.
- Only sow one type of seed per snail to avoid seedling identification confusion.


Spread compost mix along the length of the packaging material


Place seeds into the compost

A shatter-proof way to turn ceramic pots into planters



Try this simple method to make holes in crocks

Ceramic pots make lovely planters

What you'll need

- A table that doesn't wobble
- A large bowl of water
- Nail
- Hammer
- Gloves
- Safety glasses

I have a habit of accumulating ceramic pots and often wished I could turn them into plant pots but, whenever I'd tried to make drainage holes, the pots had shattered. Imagine my delight when I discovered this super simple method of making holes

How to make it

- Turn the pot upside down and place in the middle of the bowl of water, making sure water covers the whole pot.
- Gently tap a nail on the base of the pot to make the hole.

Top tips

- Turning the pot sideways when first plunging into the water should help it fill with water

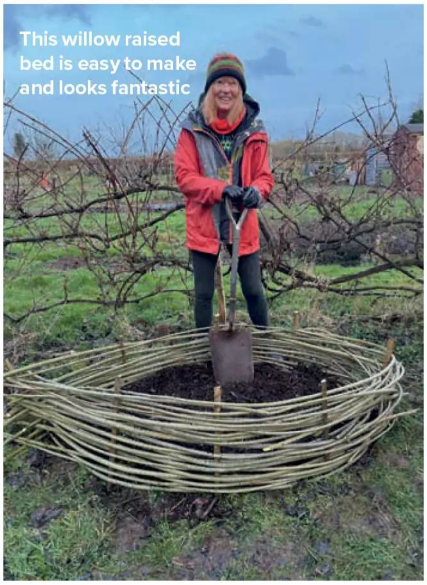
Weave your own raised bed

What you'll need

- To make an enclosure approximately 1.2m (4ft) long by 50cm (1.6ft) wide by 40cm (16in) high
- Eight stakes approximately 60cm (24in) high with ends pointed
- 30 lengths of willow or dogwood, each length approximately 2m (6.5ft)
- Lump hammer or sledge hammer

This is another simple, useful make, which can be adapted for a number of other uses, such as a compost bin, just by increasing the height of the stakes and weave.

There is a strong, absorbing, rhythmic quality to weaving with willow which I've found calms the mind, reduces stress and results in a totally uplifting experience.



This willow raised bed is easy to make and looks fantastic

How to make it

- Mark out your area and hammer in the stakes at intervals of approximately 30cm (1ft).
- Weave the willow or dogwood in and out of the stakes making sure to keep pushing down the woven stems as you add each new layer and then do a little jig of delight when you've finished.
- That's all there is to it!

Top tips

- Stakes spaced further apart make it easier to weave as bending the willow/dogwood is less pronounced.

You can follow more of Rosie's thrifty adventures on instagram **@rosieposieirving**

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All you need to know about dahlias

NEW SERIES

In this new series, dahlia expert **Kim O'Brien** explains how to grow your best ever plants

Welcome to this exciting new series that celebrates the joy of growing these beautiful upbeat blooms. Whether you're a seasoned dahlia grower or just starting out, I'll provide you with tried and tested tips, techniques, and expert advice to help elevate your dahlia-growing success.

Where to grow these dazzlers

Dahlias naturally thrive when planted in open ground, but smaller varieties can grow well in pots and many patio varieties have been developed to flourish under these conditions. Containers are a great option when working with limited spaces, such as courtyards, patios and balconies, and as long as there's plenty of sunshine - these native Mexican flowers love full sun - they will reward you with an abundance of blooms from midsummer until well into autumn.

TIP To ensure your dahlia has enough space to grow, aim for a container that's a minimum 30cm (12in) in diameter.

Feeding requirements for dahlias

Dahlias are hungry, so provide a nutrient-rich peat-free compost mixed with blood, fish and bone, and a slow-release organic fertiliser. For successional flowering, feed weekly with a tomato or seaweed-based formula during the flowering season.

Make sure your compost is free-draining by adding a generous helping of horticultural grit or perlite, and a crock in the pot's drainage hole to prevent it from becoming blocked. Be aware that overwatering or sitting in excess water can lead to tuber rot.

Everyday care tips

On very hot days, the leaves of dahlias in full sun on a patio might look wilted and dehydrated, but they often perk up in the evening. When this happens, resist the urge to water as a thorough watering once a week is usually enough to get them through even the hottest, driest of spells and they are surprisingly resilient in even sustained periods of heat.

Pots can be a magnet for slugs and earwigs which love feasting on dahlias and cause unsightly damage to their leaves. Inspect the underside of pots daily and relocate said critters to a safe distance away to prevent further attacks, which usually happen at night.

Container-grown dahlias pair beautifully with other sun-loving annuals like cosmos, zinnias and marigolds. These companions add colour and create a visually interesting display of varying forms and textures, especially the foliage of the cosmos. Dahlias also work well with other foliage plants like hebe and euphorbia.

Three varieties to try

Dahlia Happy Single Kiss ('HS Kiss)

Forms part of the Happy Single series. These plants are perfectly suited for small spaces due to their compact growing habit.

Characterised by their beautiful wide open 'single' flower form and typical bright colour, they are perfect for attracting pollinators while looking vibrant and striking on the patio. They are prolific bloomers requiring frequent, almost daily, deadheading and tend to be more pest- and disease-resistant than many other dahlia varieties.

Dahlia 'Totally Tangerine'

This is one of the earliest flowering dahlias and has a beautiful anemone form with outer petals in soft marmalade tones and a flamboyantly frilled centre of deeper spiced orange. Its hot tangerine colour can add a tropical feel to your planting. It has a compact growth habit and readily sends out blooms in quick succession, making it a top performer in patio pots and containers.

Dahlia 'Yellow Mignon'

Is one of the smaller patio varieties, compact, bushy and low maintenance. It has a long flowering season providing a delightful colour pop of single peach-yellow blooms from mid-summer onwards. This one is often likened to the sun, owing to its central disc of yellow which has petals radiating from it like rays of light.

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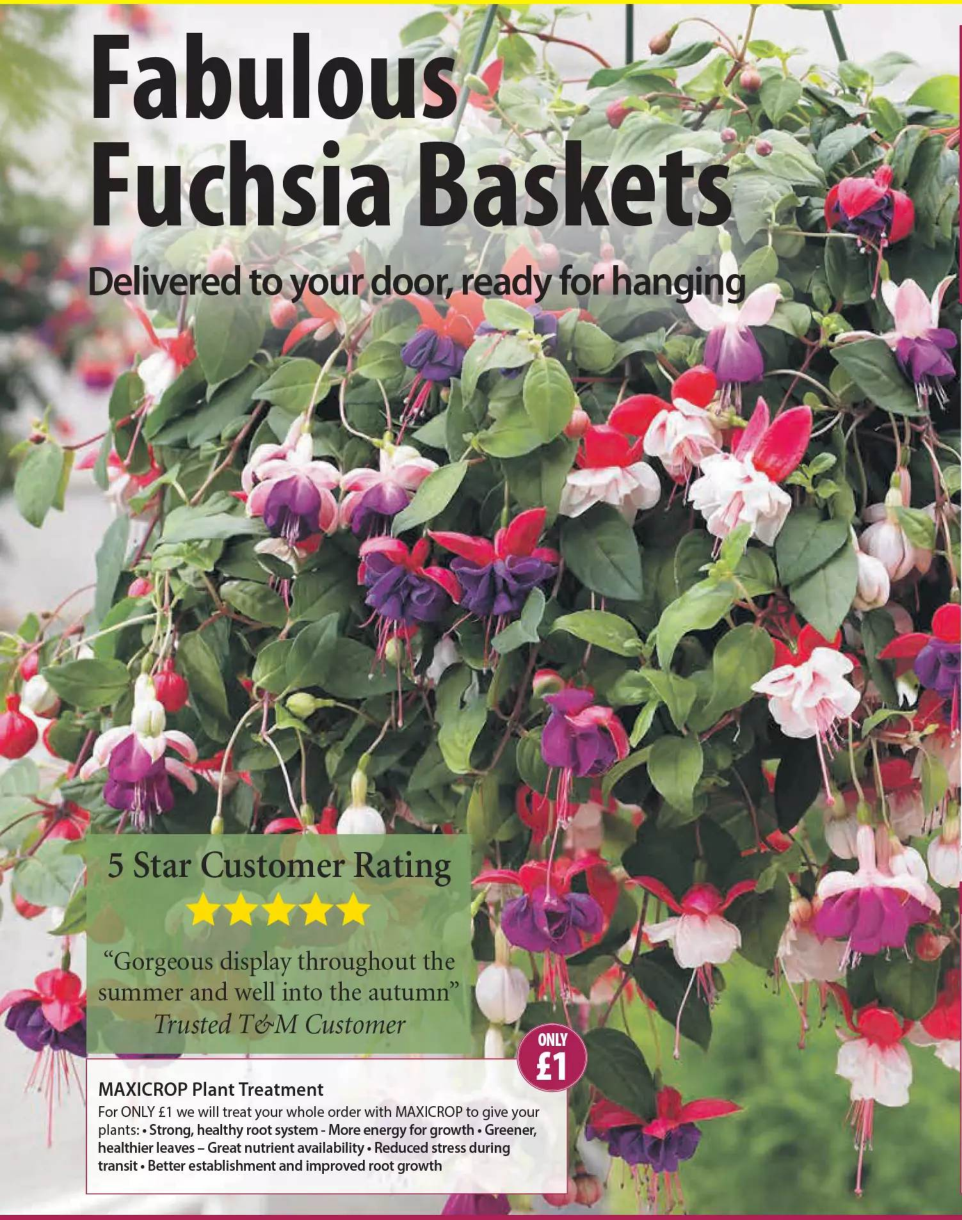

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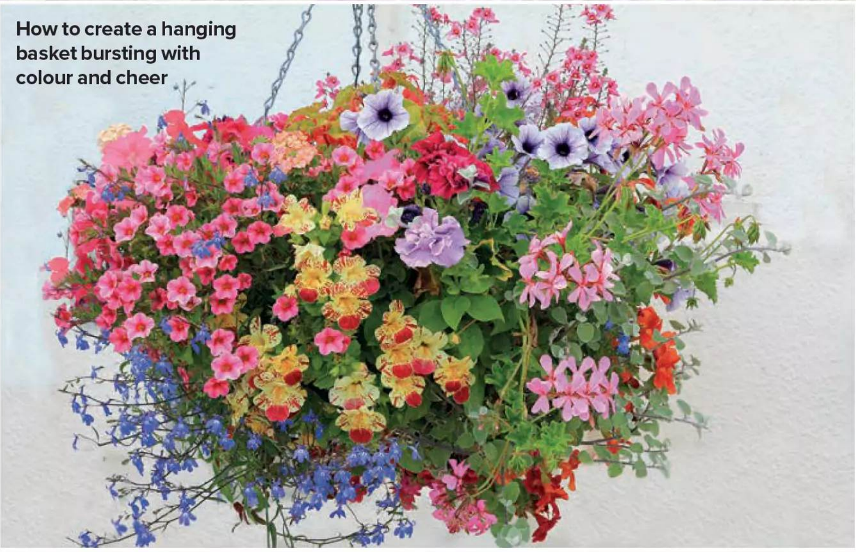
8 ideas for blooming marvellous hanging baskets

Liz Zorab explains how to use your vertical spaces to create an explosion of colour and cheer



How to create a hanging basket bursting with colour and cheer

As a child, I visited my grandfather in Spain and remember being fascinated by the sheer volume of colour and fragrance that came from hanging baskets on balconies in the narrow streets of the village where he lived.

When you are short of space, making the best use of every surface is vital and hanging baskets allow us to use the vertical space close to buildings, even when there is no access to soil at ground level. If there is room for a free-standing basket stand, you can create a colourful statement away from the house too.

Most years I create an almost single-colour hanging basket, often in shades of white, cream and pale yellow, but occasionally I opt for a riot of colour to greet us as we enter the house.

Although it might be a fashion *faux pas* to put many colours of clothing together, in the garden it is perfectly acceptable - desirable even. So don't be dissuaded from creating a hanging basket that reflects you and your family and your preferences, and plant in it exactly what makes you happy!

Nasturtium 'Peach Melba' can make a impactful trailing addition

All images unless otherwise credited: Shutterstock

Nasturtium

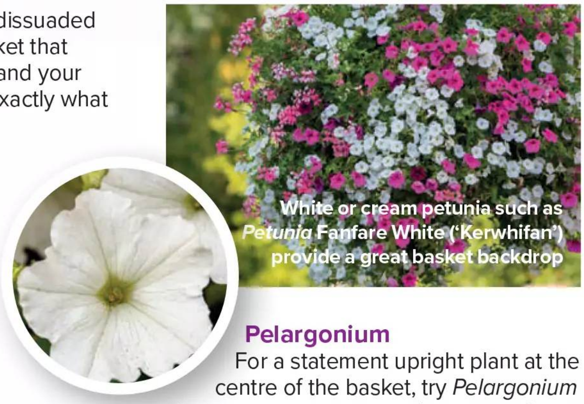
Nasturtiums are easy to grow from seeds, but can be a bit of a thug in a hanging basket, so choosing a trailing or dwarf variety is worthwhile. I like the Jewel types, and in particular 'Peach Melba'. Flowers are held above the foliage, and the leaves, flowers and seeds are edible.

Petunia Fanfare White ('Kerwhifan')

I like to include a cream or white large-flowered petunia to lighten the display and give a great background for the bright colours of other plants.

Choose a trailing petunia for planting at the edges or sides of the basket. Most petunias are fragrant and will fill the air around them with their sweet scent.

Petunia Fanfare White has crisp white flowers with green veining, which are up to 7cm (3in) diameter. As with all hanging basket plants, deadhead regularly to encourage the best display of flowers.



White or cream petunia such as *Petunia* Fanfare White ('Kerwhifan') provide a great basket backdrop

Pelargonium

For a statement upright plant at the centre of the basket, try *Pelargonium* 'Apple Blossom Rosebud'. Height 40cm (16in), spread 25-35cm (10-13in). For a trailing geranium, choose an ivy-leaf variety to provide even more interest in your hanging basket.

Pelargoniums, also known as tender geraniums, are not hardy and will need protection before the first frosts arrive, but will propagate readily from softwood cuttings.

Calibrachoa

Also known as million bells, this plant is related to petunia, with trumpet-shaped flowers, but the individual blooms are considerably smaller.

However, what it lacks in size, it makes up for in number. The plants become

***Pelargonium* 'Apple Blossom Rosebud' makes a great central display while inset trailing geraniums create wider interest**

covered in flowers that are 2-3cm (1-1.5in) across. The trailing habit makes them ideal for hanging baskets.

Available in a wide range of colours, I think the vibrant and intense pinks and oranges add a perfect splash of colour to a summer display.

Lobelia erinus

Lobelia erinus is a hanging basket essential for filling gaps and providing another layer of flowers around the outside of the basket. I like the way the tiny flowers wobble on their stems in the slightest of breezes and add movement to the display.

These tender perennials are almost always grown as trailing annuals in the UK. They are available in a wide selection of colours, including white, pinks, blues and purples. Their diminutive form does not stop them being big on impact. I particularly like a light blue shade to contrast with other plants in a hanging basket, but it also makes a statement on its own!

Begonia x *tuberhybrida*

Begonias excel at making a bold statement in a hanging basket. They offer a range of intense colours and flower forms.

Use three plants of different varieties for a riot of colour, or all the same variety for strong impact of a single colour. Try *Begonia* Bonfire ('Nzcone') for fiery red-orange flowers. This plant has been awarded the RHS Award of Garden Merit.

Glechoma hederacea 'Variegata'

In my mind, no hanging basket would be complete without plants that trail and hang down. They sway in the breeze and give the basket an additional dimension. *Glechoma hederacea* 'Variegata', also known as nepeta, is a spreading, trailing variegated plant with small green scalloped leaves edged with creamy white.

Very small, lilac-blue flowers appear in summer. Height 15cm (6in), spread 100cm (3.5ft). It is hardy throughout most of the UK and is semi-evergreen. Propagates readily from cuttings.

A hanging basket essential for gorgeous gap filling, *Lobelia erinus*

Beautiful *Begonia* x *tuberhybrida* makes a bold statement in baskets

Trailing loveliness of *Glechoma hederacea* 'Variegata'

Trailing tomatoes

Add an edible

Try adding a tomato to your hanging basket, or create a basket that only has tomatoes and perhaps some basil to go with your tomato harvest.

'Hundreds and Thousands' and also 'Maskotka' are indeterminate tomatoes, meaning the plants will continue to grow producing more flower trusses until the first frosts appear. It takes about 12 weeks from germination to first harvest.

A few years ago, I grew four tomato plants in a manger basket that was fixed to a wall. Not only did they give a great display, but I enjoyed picking a few ripe fruits each time I walked past.

As with all hanging baskets, it is essential to water thoroughly and consistently, and feed regularly as the roots are confined and cannot search further out for essential nutrients.

Tomato 'Hundreds and Thousands' is perfect for hanging basket harvests

The pretty trumpet-shaped blooms of *Calibrachoa* (million bells) add a splash of vertical colour

THE YEAR-ROUND KITCHEN GARDEN

With expert gardener and *AG* columnist, **Stephanie Hafferty**

How to help beat the veg patch hungry gap

Stephanie Hafferty shows how unexpected deliciousness can be found if you know where to look

Stephanie explains how to make the best use of available leaves and leftovers at this time of year

Towards the end of March and through April we enter the 'hungry gap', when overwintered vegetables such as kale, Brussels sprouts and parsnips start to bolt and go to flower, but it is still too early for spring-sown veg to be ready to harvest.

The garden is transforming from statuesque brassicas dominating the patch, to small transplants and newly germinating seedlings. Some of the beds look as though it has been snowing, as I tuck transplants grown in modules in the greenhouse under horticultural fleece until they are established. Although these are frost hardy crops, the protective layer helps to keep the worst of cold nights and heavy rains off the little plants until they have settled in.

To prevent leeks and parsnips from bolting, and forming hard cores which are not enjoyable to eat, dig them up and bring them into the kitchen. Trim off the leafy parts of the parsnips, and the roots of the leeks, before storing. If a leek has started to form a flower shoot, this can be snapped off and cooked like garlic scapes.

Beat the bolt

Bolting leeks and parsnips, although not tender to eat, can be added to stocks for their flavour and nutrients. Bolting brassicas, including the flowers, are delicious and completely edible. Eat the shoots like sprouting broccoli, and the leaves as you would kale. The flowers are a lovely addition to spring salads.

Remember to leave one or two brassicas to go to flower. This provides early forage for insects, including bees, and also attracts beneficial predators such as hoverflies and parasitic wasps that will help keep garden pests under control.

Why not eat your weeds?

In the wild edges of the garden, in woodlands and other wild spaces, nature offers some tasty additions to meals to help us through the hungry gap. Fresh green nettle shoots are a delicious and nutritious addition to soups, and if sautéed like spinach, the sting disappears.

Wild garlic is starting to become prolific, a pungent ingredient in salty spring pesto and risotto. I like to dry some wild garlic leaves, then crumble them into salt to make wild garlic salt, a versatile condiment that keeps for months.

Tiny spicy flavoured chickweed adds a zing to salads, and is tasty sprinkled on top of dishes. Similarly, garlic mustard is great in salads, pesto and sauces. However, always make sure you are 100% sure that you have an accurate ID before eating any wild plants.

Stored potatoes are becoming 'sprouty' now too, so I am incorporating them into as many dishes as possible before they turn too soft to enjoy. A delicious way to use up potatoes and overwintered veg is to make the classic zero waste dish: bubble and squeak.

Bolting brassica can be eaten, do leave a few to flower for early insects such as bees

All images unless otherwise credited: Stephanie Hafferty

Use up cooked leftovers in this delicious meal

Hungry Gap Bubble and Squeak

This simple and thrifty meal has one of the best names of any dish. The name comes from the sound the vegetables make whilst being fried, squeaking and bubbling to a crispy perfection. Traditionally made from leftover potatoes and vegetables from the Sunday roast, and cooked in the meat dripping, it is so delicious that it is worth cooking potatoes and veg just to make it for breakfast or dinner.

I like to add onions or leeks to bubble and squeak. This is optional, but does make it taste so good.

You can either make the bubble and squeak as one big cake, and then slice it, or form into individual patties. Both taste fantastic. Patties will need a little less cooking time.

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 300g cold cooked potatoes (with or without skins)
- 300g cold cooked vegetables - cabbage, Brussels sprouts, carrots, kale, swede, peas, etc
- 1 large onion or leek
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tbsp of oil or 1 tbsp oil with 2 tbsp butter or 3 tbsp meat dripping or fat

Method

- Mash or roughly chop the potatoes. Shred or chop the vegetables. Mix together and season with salt and pepper.

This recipe makes good use of cooked root vegetables and brassica leaves

Just some of the lovely topping options include poached egg and bacon

Mushrooms make a tasty addition

- Heat the oil in a medium sized cast iron skillet or non-stick frying pan.
- Add the onion or leek and cook until soft.
- Add the potatoes and vegetables, mix with the onion or leek, and cook on a medium heat for seven to 10 minutes until the base is brown and crispy.
- Carefully flip the bubble and squeak over and cook the other side until it is crispy and brown. You may need a little extra oil.
- Taste a little piece and adjust the seasoning.
- Serve hot, with a topping if desired.

Toppings

- Fried or poached egg
- Fried mushrooms
- Crispy bacon
- Grated cheese (vegan or dairy)

Optional extra fillings - add these to the bubble and squeak mixture when cooking

- Chopped chestnuts
- Chopped mushrooms
- Diced cooked bacon or sausage, or leftover meat from dinner
- Grated cheese

Storing

- Bubble and squeak will keep for three days in the fridge and freezes well.

Oven baked bubble and squeak

- Fry the onions or leek, if using, then mix with the vegetables. Season and place in a buttered (or oiled) oven proof dish. Bake at 200°C for 20 minutes until golden.

Air fry bubble and squeak

- Fry the onions or leek if using, then mix with the vegetables. Season and form into equal sized patties. Spray with oil on both sides then place in a single layer in the air fryer and cook at 190°C for 15 minutes, turning halfway, until golden.

For more recipe, gardening and course information from Stephanie see **www.nodighome.com**

Your GARDENING TEA BREAK

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

Camellia or Kamellia?

The genus *Camellia* – many of which are flowering now – was named by Linnaeus, in honour of Josef Kamel (1661-1706), a Moravian Jesuit plant collector. It started off as 'Kamellia', but over time the 'K' was replaced by the more commonly used 'C'. Camellias are woodland plants from Asia, mainly India, China and Japan. When they were first introduced into England, around 1730, they were kept in hot greenhouses – the gardeners then believing that everywhere in Asia was 'tropical'. Over time, camellias were experimented with in unheated conservatories, and then exposed to cooler conditions. It was not until Victorian times that they were a common sight outdoors. Today we scarcely grow them under cover at all!

Wow! I didn't know that...

- The first time a camellia bloom was seen in Europe was in a painting! Hundreds of years before camellia plants came here, the blooms were depicted on many imported Chinese painted wallpapers.
- Tea comes from the leaves of *Camellia sinensis*, making it one of the world's most important commercial plants. In India, the two most important tea crops are Darjeeling (from *C. sinensis* var. *sinensis*) from a cool and wet region tucked in the foothills of the Himalayas, and Assam (from *C. sinensis* var. *assamica*) from northeastern India.
- *C. reticulata*, many thousands of which are grown commercially, for both oil production and for gardens, is actually so rare in its natural habitat, it is considered a threatened species.
- Fossil records show that camellias were growing 40-56 million years ago in what is now Japan, and 23-40 million years ago in what is now Bulgaria and Washington State, USA.

This fortnight in gardening history

19 March 1902 A convention in Paris reached an international agreement, for the protection of wild and garden birds – the first time their protection became an official proclamation.

20 March 1727 Sir Isaac Newton, one of the planet's greatest scientists, died. A 'Flower of Kent' apple is supposed to have fallen on his head at Woolsthorpe Manor in Lincolnshire, leading to his discovery of gravity. A descendent of that apple tree exists there still.

23 March 1930 Augustine Henry, plant collector and after whom *Lilium henryi* is named, died.

29 March 1869 Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens, architect, was born. In 1888, he met the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll, and later designed her house at Munstead Wood in Surrey. It was the beginning of a professional partnership that lasted many years. He died in 1944.

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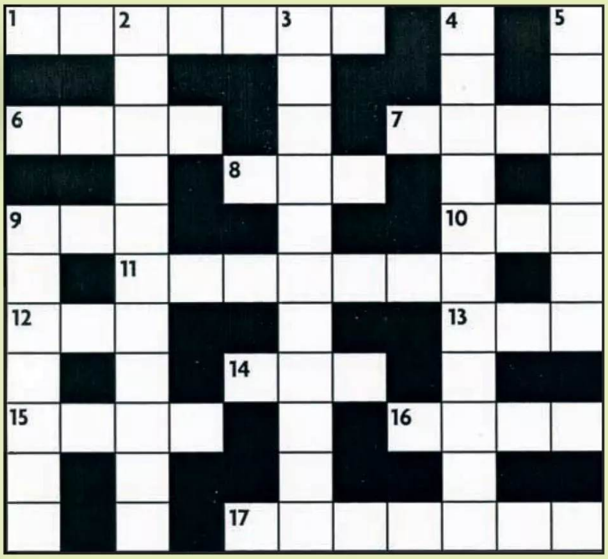
Crossword... *just for fun!*



ACROSS

1 'Eating' or 'eater' apples are also known as ________ apples (7)
6 Fertilised ovule, containing an embryonic plant, found in all flowering plants – and apples! (4)
7 *Allium christophii* is known as the ____ of Persia (4)
8 An aphid is a green or black one; a white one is totally different (3)
9 Common name for the fraxinus tree (3)
10 A grass, *Secale cereale*, found in flower yeast! (3)
11 Also known as costmary (*Tanacetum balsamita*), this scented Eurasian perennial herb has button-like yellow flowers (7)
12 *Quercus palustris* is the ____ oak, while *Prunus pensylvanica* is the ____ cherry (3)
13 America, as regards to three-quarters of the banana genus! (1,1,1)
14 Fertilised ovule, referred to this particularly in apples, oranges and grapes! (3)
15 This small quantity is the 9th letter of the Greek alphabet, as in the variegated hosta: 'One ____'! (4)
16 Daisy, dandelion and dock – each is this! (4)
17 Genus of low-growing summer perennials, often known as the creeping blue star or laurentia (7)

DOWN

2 Twining evergreen climbing houseplant with leathery leaves and clusters of highly fragrant, tubular white flowers (11)
3 Conifers let light cast back, as in mirrors, showing images! (11) (anag)
4 Common name for *Nyssa aquatica*, a large, long-lived tree that grows in the swamps and floodplains of the south-eastern US (5,6)
5 The vervain botanical group of summer-flowering annuals and perennials (7)
9 Apple is appropriate! (7) (anag)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE

ACROSS 1 Dessert 6 Seed 7 Star 8 Fly 9 Ash 10 Rye 11 Alecost 12 Pin 13 USA 14 Pip 15 Iota 16 Weed 17 Isotoma **DOWN** 2 Stephanotis 3 Reflections 4 Water tupelo 5 Verbena 9 Apples

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TRIED AND TESTED

With **Adam Kirtland**

Which products or projects would you like us to cover and trial in the magazine? Please contact **editor@amateurgardening.com** with suggestions.

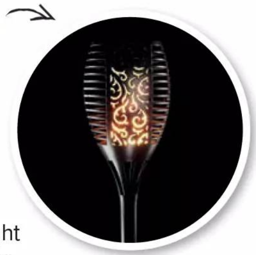
Solar lighting picks

Adam reveals some of the best sun-powered illuminations for your outside spaces

One of the best things about gardening has to be the excitement of finding new ways to make your outdoor space even better, whether that's with plants, tools or little design touches.

Garden lighting has come on a long way over the years, going from purely practical to something that can completely transform an outside area after dark. From solar path lights to statement lanterns and twinkling fairy lights, there are loads of great options out there, but here are a few that really stand out.

Solar torch light



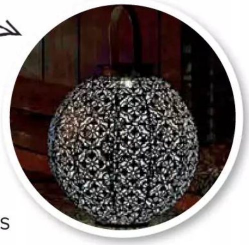
If you're after a simple but seriously impressive way to bring warmth and atmosphere to your garden, this solar torch light is a game-changer. It's wireless, fully automatic and powered by the sun - so no faffing with cables or switches.

The TrueFlame™ USB Solar Torch Light is so realistic, you'd swear it was a real flame. Plus, with the new dual power saving mode, it runs for up to 10 hours, even in winter. It's waterproof, easy to install and comes with everything you need - just pop it in place and enjoy.

Whether you're lining a path, highlighting a flower bed, or adding a cosy glow to your patio, this torch light does it all. Stylish, durable and incredibly effective, it's one of my top garden lighting picks.

Available from www.thesolarcentre.co.uk for £24.99

Solar lantern



If you love creating a cosy space, then the Damasque solar lantern from Crocus is a must-have. It soaks up the sun during the day and switches on automatically at dusk, casting beautiful patterns of dappled light through its intricate cut-outs. Whether you're hosting a summer evening gathering or just enjoying a quiet night outdoors, this lantern adds a warm, magical touch.

With a full charge, it'll glow for up to six hours, keeping the ambience just right.

Made from durable steel with a gorgeous antique rust finish, it looks as stunning in the daylight as it does when lit up at night. It also comes with a handy hanging loop, so you can suspend it from a tree, pergola, or hook. Not only attractive, but practical too – this has class as well as usefulness.

Available from www.crocus.co.uk with an RRP of £34.99

Solar LED string lights

If you love the warm, inviting glow of festoon lighting, these Ener-j Solar LED String Lights are the perfect way to bring a little magic to your outdoor space.

Stretching almost 15m (49ft) with 15 Edison-style bulbs, they instantly create that classic bistro feel for a garden party or patio dinner. They're super-energy efficient too - using 90% less power than traditional bulbs and lasting up to 30,000 hours, so you won't be constantly replacing them.

They are designed to withstand year-round weather and built with heavy-duty wiring, making them tough enough for any season. Installation is simple - just use hooks, guide wires or zip ties, and you can even connect up to 30 strands for a truly stunning display.

Available from www.robertdyas.co.uk with an RRP of £59.99

Mini-mushroom solar lights

I couldn't leave out a garden lighting option that's a little different, could I? These 12 mini-mushroom solar lights are a great way to add a soft glow to your garden in a unique way. Each one is 20cm (8in) tall with a warm white LED inside, and once staked into soil, they'll sit between 5-10cm (2-4in) above the ground, giving a nice mix of heights.

They're perfect for tucking under trees or shrubs, and one set will cover about 2m sq (6.5ft). Set up is easy - just pop the solar panel in a sunny spot using the 2m (6.5ft) wire, and they'll charge up during the day.

See www.lights4fun.co.uk for just £12.99

You can follow Adam on Instagram **@viewfromthepottingbench**

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So many sensational tulip displays to discover this spring (Morton Hall Gardens, Worcestershire pictured)

Glorious garden visits in association with Great British Gardens

7 tantalising tulip displays

Did you know that tulips originated in Central Asia? The name 'tulip' was thought to have come from the Persian word for a turban, as the flowers were thought to resemble turbans (with a bit of imagination perhaps). Nowadays they are planted in British gardens everywhere, flowering from April until mid-May.

Here we look at seven gardens where you can see stunning displays of tulips to take your breath away.

Arundel Castle Gardens - Sussex

The tulip festival here is one of the finest displays in Europe and is set against the breath-taking backdrop of the castle. A sea of colour awaits you, as the festival showcases more than 120 different named tulips planted by the castle's award-winning head gardener Martin Duncan and his team. This year's festival is set to feature more than 110,000 tulips, creating a stunning display of colour and beauty as the bulbs burst into bloom.

- **Café and shop.**

Above: One of the finest tulip displays in Europe at Arundel Castle Gardens in Sussex

All images © Great British Gardens

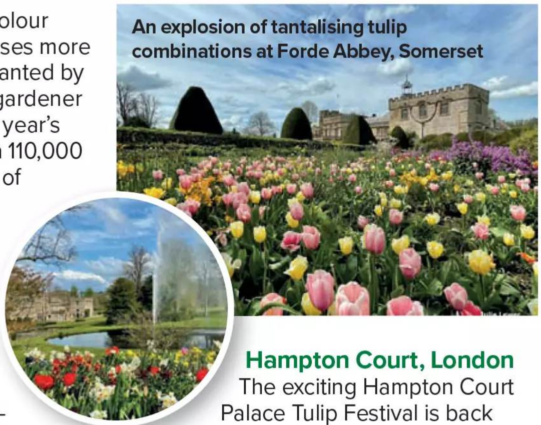
Forde Abbey, Somerset

This spring there will be an explosion of colour at this historic site, with tulips taking centre stage. There are early, mid-season and later-flowering varieties to bloom right from the beginning of April to mid May.

There are selected combinations in various heart-warming colours to welcome you, and a mixture of wild varieties have been planted in other parts of the garden to blend in harmoniously with the wildflower meadows.

Quite unique is the tulip swirl inspired by a 'penitential spiral' from monastic times, which was used for meditation by the monks.

- **Café and shop. Dogs welcome on short leads.**

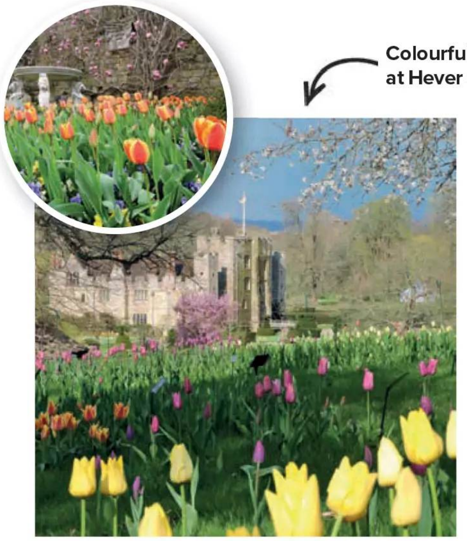

An explosion of tantalising tulip combinations at Forde Abbey, Somerset

Hampton Court, London

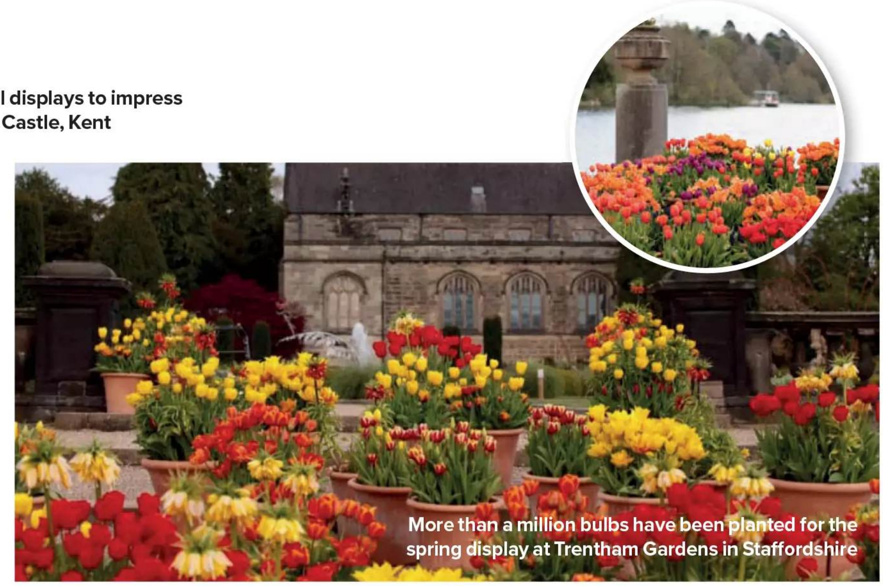
The exciting Hampton Court Palace Tulip Festival is back in 2025 with more than 100,000 plants erupting into colour to form one of the UK's biggest displays of planted tulips.

This year's tulip festival does really

Above: More than 100,00 plants on display at Hampton Court, London



Colourful displays to impress at Hever Castle, Kent



More than a million bulbs have been planted for the spring display at Trentham Gardens in Staffordshire

promise a floral spectacle like no other. Explore 60 acres of breath-taking royal gardens and experience Henry VIII's famous grounds. The site is a World Tulip Garden Award winner.

- **Restaurant and shop.**

Hever Castle, Kent

From tulips to blossoms and bluebells, Hever Castle & Gardens have got spring covered this year with a colourful celebration that promises to delight.

Tulips take top spot with naturalistic displays in the grounds and more formal displays in the walled garden. In addition, you can also see the stunning colours of spring bedding, cherry, and apple blossom, magnolias, early rhododendrons, hyacinths, camassias and bluebells - there's so much to celebrate in the grounds.

- **Restaurant and shop.**

Morton Hall Gardens, Worcestershire

Each year the gardens hold a wonderful tulip festival, and this year it takes place in early May.

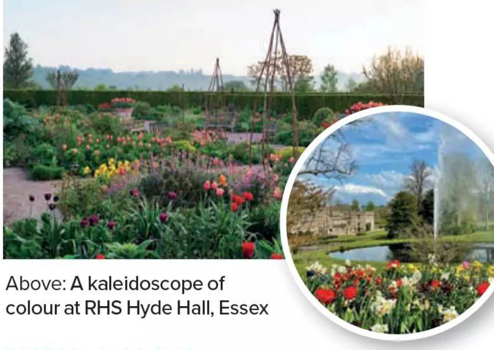
In addition to intricate tulip planting schemes in formal borders and pots, swathes of naturalised bulbs may be enjoyed in the glorious spring meadows and woodland gardens. Many more magical tulip varieties will be on display as cut flowers. Because of the popularity of this event, all tickets must be pre-booked.

- **Refreshments and shop.**

Trentham Gardens – Staffordshire

Over a million bulbs have been planted for the garden's annual spring bulb festival, giving visitors an uplifting, immersive and colourful experience as they walk through the gardens. The highlight will be the tulip displays in April with the Italian Gardens truly coming alive with tulips packed with fragrance and alive with bees looking for an early source of spring nectar. The woodland meadows will also be carpeted with white wood anemones.

- **Restaurants, shops, dogs welcome on leads**



Above: A kaleidoscope of colour at RHS Hyde Hall, Essex

RHS Hyde Hall, Essex

This spring, RHS Garden Hyde Hall near Chelmsford will be a kaleidoscope of colour as more than 8,500 tulip bulbs burst into bloom transforming the Cottage Garden, Floral Fantasia Garden and Hilltop Garden into a floral paradise.

Don't miss the stunning container displays too. There's so much more to see on your visit, from Hyde Hall's iconic Dry Garden to exciting new features. This amazing place is going from strength to strength.

- **Restaurant and shop.**

Above: Wonderful displays in beds, pots and naturalised displays at Morton Hall Gardens, Worcestershire

Great British Gardens

For further details of these gardens and over 40 more places to see tulips please visit https://www.greatbritishgardens.co.uk/seasonal/tulips.html or scan the QR code on your smartphone.

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Million Bells Mix

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Supplied as:
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M7298 20 Plants ~~£39.96~~
Sale Price £19.98
Discounted Price £17.98

Giant Fuchsia Mix

Add beauty to your hanging baskets with our mixture. Producing some of the most unmistakably beautiful blooms. Trailing up to 60cm, flowering June to October.

Supplied as:
UK-grown 3cm jumbo plug plants.

M321 24 Plants ~~£39.96~~
Sale Price £19.98
Discounted Price £17.98

Trailing Surfinia Mix

This iconic bloom is guaranteed to create a dramatic display, producing green foliage and velvety blooms. Trailing up to 80-100cm from June to October.

Supplied as:
UK-grown 3cm jumbo plug plants.

M600 24 Plants ~~£39.96~~
Sale Price £19.98
Discounted Price £17.98

Begonia Illumination Mix

An outstanding mixture, producing multi coloured double flower heads. From June to October they will spill over hanging baskets and containers, trailing up to 60cm.

Supplied as:
UK-grown 3cm jumbo plug plants.

M101 24 Plants ~~£39.96~~
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Azalea japonica Mix

A very effective evergreen mixture of dwarf growing Azalea that will make a real impact in the garden from April to May. We guarantee three different flower-coloured varieties in our mixture.

Supplied as:
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Supplied as:
5cm modules and loose plants.

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Hosta Mix

Loved for their unique and attractive designer foliage. Perfect for brightening up garden borders with their bold, details foliage and wonderful summer flowers. Height 30-60cm

Supplied as:
First grade loose perennials supplied.

KL548 10 Plants ~~£15.98~~
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Dahlia Mignon Mix

Perfect for creating an impact in the garden, producing colourful flower heads with contrasting bright yellow centres. Flowering from June to October. Height 60-90cm.

Supplied as:
Bedding sized tubers supplied

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GROWING FROM SEED

with **Ruth Hayes**, AG's gardening expert

Short-lived trumpets to herald a heavenly summer

Morning glories are brief but beautiful

A Mexican plant with flowers the colour of the Mediterranean sky - if you're looking for something to bring brightness to your garden this summer, look no further than Morning Glory 'Heavenly Blue'.

They remind me of Spanish holidays where you see their cerulean blue trumpets scrambling over walls and twining up telegraph poles - always looking much more attractive and acceptable than our smaller native bindweed!

A popular annual here in the UK, morning glory (*Ipomoea tricolor*), is in fact a short-lived perennial in its native land, and is renowned for its short-lived flowers that open with the morning sun but rarely last long enough to see the day out.

But they pack a beautiful punch for all their brevity, the long, curled buds unfurling into large, splendidly-coloured trumpets.

I like to sow them around an obelisk set in a sunny flowerbed, so they can scramble up and turn their faces to the sky.

Morning glory is also a useful space filler when it comes to filling gaps against a trellis or wall where you may have planted a slower-growing perennial climber that has yet to really find its feet.

Above: 'Heavenly Blue' morning glory has shades of the Mediterranean sky

Sow the seeds thinly onto a tray of good quality peat-free seed compost that has been sieved to remove lumps and dampened with tap water.

It will help if you tamp the compost flat before sowing to give the seeds a stable seedbed. When your seedlings are large enough, pot them on individually into small pots and grow them until they are large enough to be hardened off and added to the garden.

All images credit: © Shutterstock

Sow these robust beauties

- Clarkia, (also known as godetia) may look like delicate ballerinas but their stunning, ruffled looks and rosy petals belie a sturdy frame.
- They are hardy annuals, well able to deal with British weather, so now is the time to sow where you want to grow, in a sunny patch of soil that is rich and free-draining.
- The variety 'Thoroughly Modern Millie' has multitudes of pink and salmon-toned petals that look remarkably like azalea flowers. The texture of their petals has given these plants, which are Canadian natives, their common name 'satin flower'.
- Scatter the seeds thinly where you want them to grow after preparing the soil by clearing it of weeds and stones and raking it until it is fine and crumbly.
- Water the soil then sow the seeds and cover them with a thin layer of soil, before gently firming it down and labelling the spot to avoid disturbing germination later on.
- You may need to thin the seedlings if they appear overcrowded.
- Deadhead regularly for prolonged flowering and keep the soil damp during dry periods.

Clarkia flowers have satin-sheened petals in shades of pink

What's On

21 Mar: The Generous Gardener's Specialist Plant Fair, Charlton Farm, Pink Lane. Malmesbury, Wiltshire, SN16 9DS. 10am-2pm.
21 Mar: Specialist Plant Fair, The Coach House Garden, Ampney Crucis, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 5RY. 10am-2pm.
21-22 Mar: Duchy of Cornwall Nursery Orchid Celebration, Duchy of Cornwall Nursery, Cott Road, Lostwithiel, Cornwall, PL22 0HW. 9am-4.30pm.
22-23 Mar: Thriplow Daffodil Weekend, Thriplow in Royston, Cambridgeshire, SG8. 11am-5pm.
22 Mar: Alpine Garden Society South West Show, RHS Garden Rosemoor: Rosemoor, Great Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH.
22-23 Mar: Burnham Nurseries & Orchid Paradise Open Weekend, Burnham Nurseries, Forches Cross, Newton Abbot, Devon, England, TQ12 6PZ.
22 Mar: Sedgemoor Seed Swap, Purplespoon Cafe, Church Street, Highbridge, Somerset, TA9 3AG.
22 Mar: Plant Fair, Digby Hall, Hound Street, Sherborne, Dorset, DT9 3AA. 10am-2pm.
22-23 Mar: Bonsai Show, RHS Garden Wisley, Wisley Lane, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB.
23 Mar: Plant Hunters Fair, Arley Hall & Gardens, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6NA. 10am-4pm.
23 Mar: Plant Fairs Roadshow Early Spring Plant Fair, Hever Castle, Hever, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 7NG. 10.30am-3.30pm.
23 Mar: Islington Seed Swap, Olden Community Garden, 22 Whistler Street, London, N5 1NH.
26 Mar: Conwy Seed Fair, High Street, Conwy, North Wales, LL32 8DB. 9am-4pm.
29 Mar: Rare Plant Fair, Evenley Wood Garden, Northamptonshire, NN13 5SH. 10am-4pm.
29 Mar: Plant Hunters' Fair, Bodenham Arboretum, Wolverley, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY11 5TB. 10am-4pm.
29 Mar: Hayling Horticultural Society Seed Swap, Hayling United Reformed Church, Hollow Lane, Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 9EY. 10am-noon.
29 Mar: Spring Seed Swap, Plant Sale, & Fun Day, Merstham Hub, 2b Portland Drive, Merstham, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 3JB.
30 Mar: Plant Hunters' Fair, Sugnall Walled Garden, Sugnall, Stafford, Staffordshire, ST21 6NF. 10am-4pm.

Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to **pumpkinbeth.com** for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to **editor@amateurgardening.com** Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

Polytunnel growing

With an undercover space, lots of produce can be available to pick in March (Stephanie's tunnel pictured)

How to get your polytunnel going

Stephanie Hafferty explains how with the right spot and a stable build, you'll be undercover growing in no time

The first thing to decide when getting a polytunnel is where to put it. If you have plenty of space, then ideally place your polytunnel on level ground with a north/south orientation. This means that both sides of the structure receive equal amounts of daylight, but thankfully, orientation is not critical and east /west will be fine.

Most of us have to make do with fitting it in where there is space, and this is what I have done here in Wales. The good news is that despite not being perfect, the polytunnels have worked really well, growing produce throughout the year.

If siting on a slope, it is best to construct it vertically along the slope rather than horizontally across. This ensures good airflow, and good tension for the polythene, which makes the structure more stable and helps the polythene last longer. Other considerations include proximity to trees and buildings which can cast shade. Try to avoid locating the polytunnel in frost pockets or areas prone to waterlogging.

Think about access

Ideally, locate the tunnel with at least 1m (3.5ft) access all around, for maintenance. In my previous garden I had to locate the tunnel just 30cm (1ft) from a low hedge, which meant that I had to do a side-shuffle to maintain both hedge and polythene. I looked a bit strange but it was manageable!

Ventilation is crucial for the health of plants.

To encourage airflow year-round, even when the doors are shut, ensure that the doors are 1/3 covered with fine mesh. In hot locations, side ventilation is also a good option.

Stability is important, especially in windy locations.

Base plates help to secure the structure firmly to the ground, and storm braces add stability. Tight polythene further ensures stability and increases the lifespan of the cover.

Good construction is key

Building the frame is surprisingly easy, and covering it works best if you can gather a few people together to help. Choose a warm, dry and - crucially - calm day. A broom with an old soft towel tied across the brush is invaluable for helping the polythene slide across the top without needing a ladder.

Alternatively, you can hire a qualified polytunnel construction team to do this.

Time then to create the beds

I made my beds using cardboard and compost, no-dig style. These can be sown and planted up right away.

All images © Stephanie Hafferty

Get some helpers to construct your tunnel

To do now undercover

Fortnight tips

- Continue ventilating every day if possible, to reduce the risk of mildews and mould.
- Sow summer-cropping plants for growing undercover: tomatoes, tomatillo, basil, melon, cucumber, courgette, summer squash, luffa, shark fin gourd, perilla shiso and cape gooseberry.
- Sow seed for companion flowers for undercover: marigold, viola, calendula, borage and nasturtium.
- It's a bit late now for sowing aubergines, chillies or sweet peppers, so buy in small plants and pot on.
- Clear overwintered crops as they finish and compost.
- Mulch beds as the winter crops are cleared.
- Check the polythene and repair any small holes or tears with clear repair tape.
- Check under pots and down the sides of the polytunnel for slugs and snails, relocating them to a wild patch outside. They love to lurk in the area where the soil meets the plastic.
- Keep crop bars and support wires clean. They are ideal for hanging up your washing on wet days!

Right: Companion plants such as marigold can be grown from seed now

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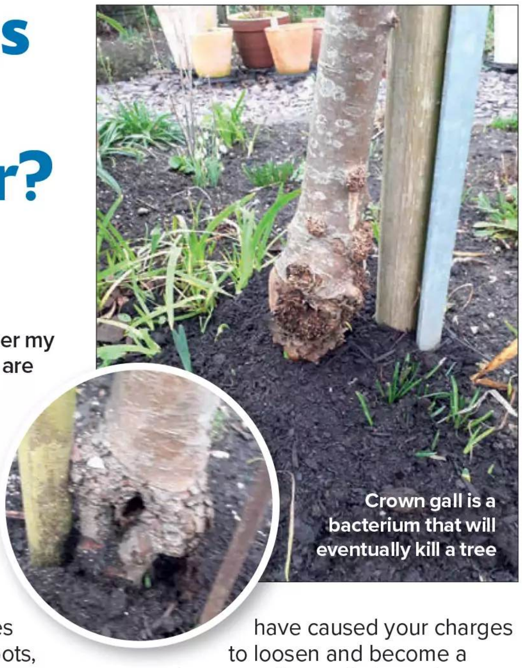
Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Are my trees suffering from canker?

Bulbous growths are known as 'burr knots'



Crown gall is a bacterium that will eventually kill a tree

Q Can you advise me as to whether my apple and pear trees, pictured, are worth keeping? They look as if they might have canker.
Linda Griffin (via email)

A Thank you for the excellent images of your apple and pear trees. Both appear to be infected with crown gall *Rhizobium radiobacter (*syn *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*) a bacterium that causes burr knot tumours to break out on roots, crowns and trunks.

Pleasingly, as your trees are 'middle aged' and appear to have been infected for several years, it's probable that they have developed some form of immunity to the bacterium and will continue to flourish for a long time yet.

Ultimately, the bacterium will win and your trees will die. Meanwhile, check them occasionally to see if dying roots have caused your charges to loosen and become a dangerously unsafe hazard.

If you choose to replace the trees, I wouldn't plant new ones in the same spot: as your apple and pear are older than ten years, their roots will have built up a fungus which may attack the newcomers and cause them to languish for months before dying. It's called replant disease and the best way to avoid this is to plant your new trees well away from the older ones.

Peat-free compost should be the way forward

Q In a magazine I read a piece by a celebrity gardener who made it clear that peat-free compost is not as good as compost containing peat. I always buy peat-free compost with added John Innes but have similar reservations. I know we will have to use peat-free compost in the future, but what do you think?
Janet Savage (via email)

A Using peat-free compost is what we should all do as it will help to conserve our wetlands, is vital for wildlife and plants, and there will be more areas to capture carbon dioxide which won't then contaminate the atmosphere.

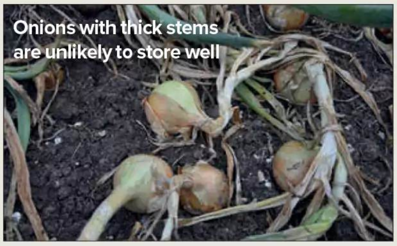
Pleasingly, researchers have now pioneered high quality peat-free brands of sowing and potting compost that are not only as good as those containing peat but, in some instances, perform better.

Gardening brands are spending a lot of time and money on research to make their peat-free composts as good as they can be. They are making great strides in improving their products, and they should be applauded for that.

WOOL COMPOST

Above: Peat-free composts are getting better thanks to investment and research

Quick questions & answers



Onions with thick stems are unlikely to store well

Why have our onions got thick stems?

Q Our onions (grown from sets) have cropped well but have thick stems, why is this?
Barry Dyer (via email)

A I am sorry that your onion sets have developed thick stems.

The usual reason is that they have been stressed by drought or cold soil, which has checked growth and resulted in 'tough' stems which, in time, will flower and seed.

As a result, the bulbs won't store well unfortunately, but it is nature's way of helping the plant overcome adversity and perpetuate the species.

Never eat unidentified fungi

Q Last autumn we had lots of mushrooms in our borders, they looked edible but we decided not to eat them. What should we do if they return this year?
David Hardgreaves (via email)

A Though the mushrooms in question appear to be the edible kind, correct identification and spore prints are essential to make sure, so I urge you not eat them. They may be poisonous or you may be allergic to them.

The quickest way to eradicate them is to hoe them out and leave them to decay on the surface, or consign them to another part of the garden where there are flowering plants or shrubs.

Right: Leave any mushrooms you are not sure about to rot down

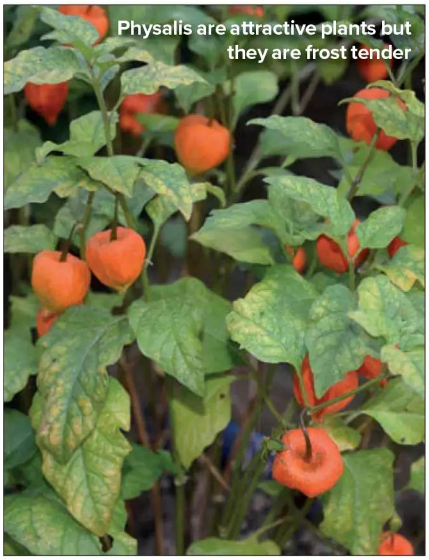
Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

How can I have success with physalis?

Both common varieties are frost tender, so take care

Q I sowed physalis seeds indoors last year and they did very well, until the frost came. The plants flowered and were starting to fruit, but died back with the frost. Unfortunately, I was unable to harvest fruit. Although I had planted them outside, I did cover them when frost was forecast, but as I say, they died back. I was wondering if they will come back this year or are they finished?
Margaret Laneres, Glasgow



Physalis are attractive plants but they are frost tender

A I am wondering which physalis you are growing? All species and varieties are frost tender, which is why your plants died when temperatures dropped to around freezing point.

The two most commonly grown culinary kinds are Cape gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana*) and tomatillo. There are two forms of the latter: *P. ixocarpa* and *P. philadelphica*. Both have the common name of husk tomato.

All three are perennials but usually grown as annuals, like you would tomatoes. I suggest that you start again this year, raising plants in March or April in a warm, light place and growing them in a heated greenhouse or somewhere similar until June, when nights are warmer and frost free.

They should crop well and you should be harvesting fruits well into September.

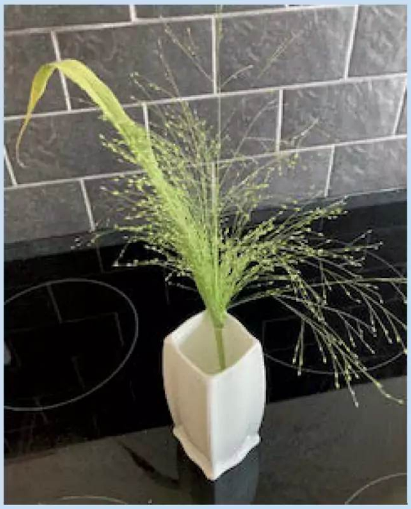
Please can you name this pretty grass?

Q Please could you help me identify this grass? It was part of the green foliage that I received in a flower bouquet last autumn. It was beautiful, just very light and dainty and I would love to be able to grow it myself.
Judith Parry (via email)

A What captivating grass to have as part of a floral bouquet. Commonly called witch or crabgrass, you will find it catalogued as *Panicum capillare*.

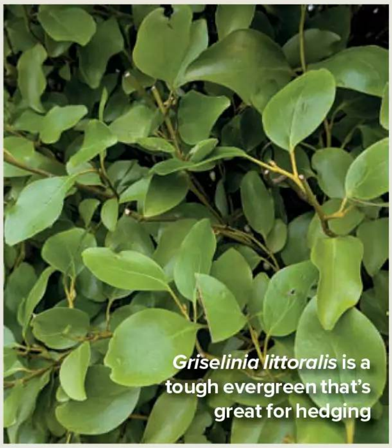
Appealingly sculptural, it is indigenous to North America. We agree with you, it has innate charm and, pleasingly, it's hardy in Britain.

Provided you find it a sheltered sunny spot and plant it in organically rich soil it should thrive for you. You can then use it to enhance your own flower arrangements.



Above: **Crabgrass is a beautifully airy ornamental variety**

Quick questions & answers



***Griselinia littoralis* is a tough evergreen that's great for hedging**

What is this in our hedge?

Q This tree is growing as part of our garden hedge - please can you name it for us?
Robyn Knight (via email).

A The tree in question appears to be *Griselinia littoralis*, commonly called broadleaf. A frost-hardy native of New Zealand, it happily withstands most British winters in the South and West.

If it gets too high, I suggest you give it a trim in late summer or very early autumn, giving the pruning cuts time to heal before the temperature drops.

Colourful currant is a delightful shrub for early spring colour

Q Please can you identify this shrub and tell me how to care for it?
Sue Carnworth, Bristol

A What a beautiful flowering currant, which appears to be a variety of *Ribes sanguineum*, probably 'Carneum Grandiflorum'.

Ideally, feed it monthly from April to September with a balanced fertiliser, such as Vitax Q4, and prune it annually after flowering, shortening one stem in three to half its length to encourage strong new growth that will bloom the following year.

Left: Flowering currants really brighten the garden

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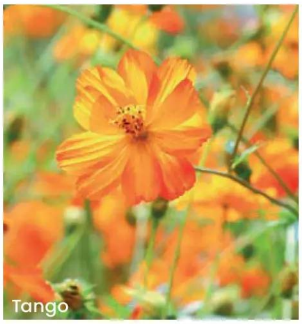
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Naomi

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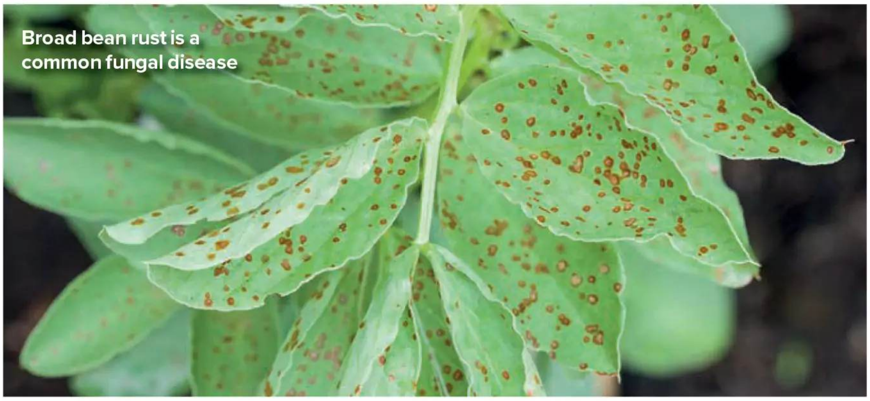
AGHY

Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions



Broad bean rust is a common fungal disease

Is it safe to grow beans again after disease?

Garden hygiene and crop rotation helps keep plants healthy

Q I had a bad case of rust on my broad beans last year. Is it OK to sow seed in the same garden plot or will the problem remain in the soil?
Tessa Smart (via email)

A I am sorry that your broad beans have succumbed to rust disease, characterised by a profusion of minute rusty brown spots. If dark brownish streaks, rather than tiny circles, are seen, the problem could be chocolate spot.

All you can do to remedy both fungi, which overwinter on dead stems, is to clear and bin residual vegetation at the end of the season and sow another crop where broad beans have not been grown for at least three years.

When you are ready for sowing – November for a spring crop or March or April for an early summer harvest – enrich soil with a nitrogenous fertiliser, such as Growmore.

Then set seeds 5cm (2in) deep and 20cm (8in) apart in double rows 20cm (8in) distant, spacing double rows 60cm (2ft) apart.

Why have my citrus leaves turned brown?

Q The leaves on my citrus tree are turning brown, even though the soil feels damp. What should I do?
B Hillier, Leicester

A The usual reason for citrus leaves turning brown is low winter temperatures below the ideal of 10-12C (50-55F).

They can also suffer if the air in the room where they are overwintering is dry due to central heating.

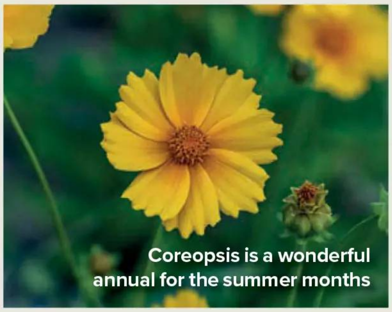
Encourage your plant to make a good recovery by repotting it now in ericaceous compost, then after six weeks or so, feed regularly with a specially formulated liquid citrus fertiliser.

Water when the compost feels dry and, when the plant is indoors, mist the leaves frequently with lime-free water to reduce the risk of pest attack. Stand the pot on feet to ensure that excess moisture can escape freely.

When late frosts finish, in May or June, move the plant outdoors into a warm spot – out of direct hot sunlight.

Left: Keep citrus leaves looking fresh with warmth and humidity

Quick questions & answers



Coreopsis is a wonderful annual for the summer months

What is this sunny flower?

Q Can you identify this flower? It is around 90cm (3ft) tall and it came in a pack of annual seeds.
David Allum (via email)

A It looks like a coreopsis or tickseed. Blooming for months in summer, its bright yellow blossoms enchant a border.

If you wish to grow it again, I suggest that you opt for *Coreopsis lanceolata* 'Sterntaler', a hardy free-flowering perennial. Seeds readily germinate in gentle heat in March.

It is widely available from the usual seed brands.

Is it safe to feed the birds?

Q I've read that disease is spreading through garden birds - should we stop feeding them?
Simon Hough (via email)

A Not at all - in fact as they are preparing to nest and breed it's important to keep them well-fed.

What we should be doing, though, is cleaning bird feeders and bird baths regularly to remove old food and dirty water and help prevent the spread of disease.

Use warm water and organic disinfectant, and grab a bottle brush so you get the feeders really clean. Rinse them well and let them dry before refilling with bird food.

Left: Remember to wash bird feeders and bird baths regularly

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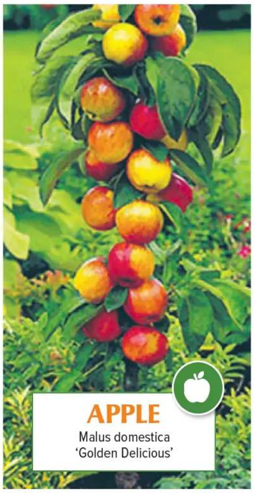
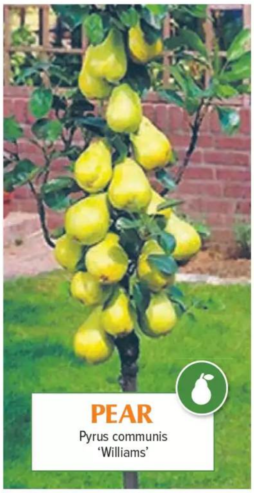


APPLE
Malus domestica
'Golden Delicious'



PEAR
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How to get seed sowing sussed

Toby explains everything you need to know to get a seed sowing spring in your step

The old proverb, 'The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago' is as true today as it was..., 20 years ago. But don't feel bad if you're rudely late to that planting party, because another shindig is just getting started!

The spring equinox (20th March), is the moment when the hours or daylight are equal to those of night and building faster than at any time of year - by a noticeable four minutes every day.

Gardeners cooped up for winter aren't alone in clocking this change and seeds that have lain dormant in the soil or freshly sown from seed packets also respond to this shot of energy. From alyssum to zinnia, aubergine to zucchini, seeds sown indoors now will sprout and grow with less fuss and worry than at any other time of year.

This window of indoor-sowing opportunity stays open until late April, which is good news for all compulsive seed-orderers (you're in good company here!) as sowings can be staggered. This ensures you have space to keep tender plants like tomatoes and half-hardy annuals such as cosmos frost-free. Make the rookie error of sowing every flower and veg at the same time, they'll sprout all at once and you'll need either the windowsill space of skyscraper or a dome at The Eden Project to grow them on.

© Toby Buckland

Always read the sowing instructions on the back of seed packets

My starter seeds are the relatively small, tender types like tomatoes, tagetes, nicotiana, aubergines and chillies that can sit in their pots waiting for the frosts to finish. Big stuff - sunflowers, pumpkins, courgettes and corn, I leave to the end of April as once they sprout they fill out like cuckoos quickly outgrowing their pots and smothering their neighbours. Sown late, they'll make planting size just as the frosts are coming to an end.

Practical tips for compost

- The first rule of the seed-sowing soiree is to buy fresh compost as old stuff that's been kicking around in its bag and getting wet in the shed isn't reliable. Moisture changes the chemical balance of potting compost, releasing food and changing the pH. This makes it 'too punchy' for seeds and the surfeit of phosphates inhibits germination while the nitrogen scorches tender roots.
- Don't throw this old stuff away though. It's fine for moving established plants to larger containers, but only use new for seeds.

© Toby Buckland

It's such a thrill to see your seedlings start to germinate!

There's no need for large pots and modules as you'll only be wasting compost

© Shutterstock

■ Specialist seed and cutting compost formulations are best, being smooth to handle and nutrient 'light', however they are on the expensive side compared with 'Jack-of-all-trades' multi-purpose mixes. These are okay because they are low on fertiliser but can be very lumpy, making it difficult to prick out (move individual seedlings to their own pots) without tearing the roots. Depending on which brand you buy, a sieve might be a useful investment.

I use square 9cm (3.5in) (across the top) containers because they sit together without gaps on my greenhouse bench, which makes for easier watering. They don't need to be bigger as they only have to accommodate seeds until they're up and large enough to handle. Go large and you're wasting potting compost.

■ That said, never skimp when filling the pots (so many gardeners do). If compost comes up shy of the top, the shadow cast by the rim causes stems to stretch like cress - a legginess from which they never fully recover.

■ Filling pots to the brim makes for stocky seedlings and sturdy plants, but because compost slumps after watering, I give pots a soak with a rose fixed to the can and top-up and shower again. Then I pick off any sticks, lumps and bumps to leave an even surface that's 2-5mm (1/3in) max, from the rim.

Seed sowing advice

They say a picture speaks 1,000 words and that's why after lusting over the photo on the front of a seed packet, few of us bother to read the blurb on the back. I'm as guilty of this as anyone, but there is info about sowing depth and density that's useful, plus and all important 'sow by date'.

■ If seeds go beyond this, I check that they're viable by floating a few in a jar of water. If they sink after being left for an hour and poked around with a finger, they're good to sow but if they bob about, they're as lifeless as corks.

■ You can tell a lot by looking at a seed. The bigger the kernel the bigger the seedling (obvs) and the more space you need between each one. For tomatoes and chillies I aim to space kernels one centimetre apart roughly five to 15 seeds per pot depending how many plants I need. Courgettes being 10 times bigger need 10 times the space, so just one seed per pot is fine. This also means they don't need pricking out.

■ Avoid adding an extra pinch 'for luck' as if sown too close, seedlings fight for light and become leggy.

■ Most seeds only need enough compost to just hide the kernels out of sight. A sieve is the tool for this job but if you don't own a one, a spare pot part filled with compost and shaken over the seeds works well as only fine particles fall through the drainage holes.

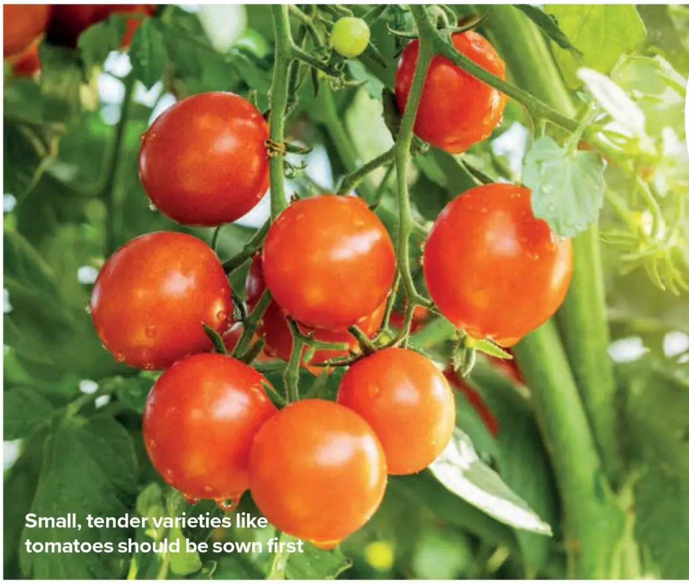
If you read the seed packets (who does that!?), you'll see that very small, dust-like seeds – lobelia, begonia and nicotiana shouldn't be covered at all, as they need sunlight to sprout.

■ If pots are soaked well, before sowing, seeds rarely need watering until they're up.

Two things to know if you notice the compost drying out though: only use water from the tap - collected rain can contain disease that'll kill your seedlings (like old compost, it's fine on established plants) and rather than a can which will slosh seeds out of their pots, use a hand mister spray.

It's much more gentle.

Happy spring sowing!



Small, tender varieties like tomatoes should be sown first

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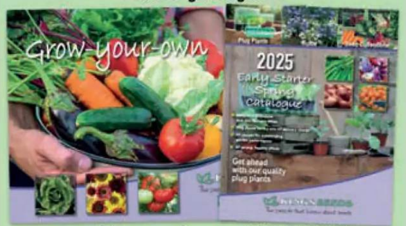
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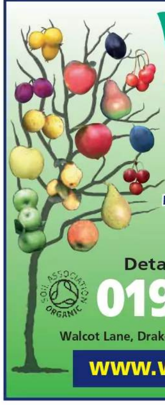

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PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Your plant recommendations from expert plantsman, Michael.

6 show-stopping plant trends to look out for

Michael reveals some eye-catching botanical models that will stop you in your tracks

When I first started planning my 'Plant Fashion Show', I had no idea how it would be received. A catwalk for plants? Would people take it seriously? But as it turns out, the horticultural world is more than ready for a bit of glitz and glamour!

In collaboration with PlantLine, I hosted what we think is the world's first-ever plant-inspired catwalk, and I can confirm that plants strut their stuff just as well as models. With cutting-edge trends on display, we had industry experts in attendance – including a rather convincing Anna Wintour lookalike, who certainly helped draw the plant paparazzi!

Let's take a look at what's in vogue for 2025, and roll out the green carpet for the plants leading the way.

Hedges & wedges

Hedges have taken a hit in recent years, with box blight and caterpillars, and poor cold tolerance, leaving many gardeners searching for alternatives. Enter the 'hedges and wedges' trend, which breathes new life into boundary planting and ground cover solutions.

Heading the charge is *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Beach Ball', a compact, evergreen shrub with a naturally rounded habit that generally requires no pruning. Its dense, grey-green foliage provides year-round structure, while fragrant purple flowers add interest in late spring. Ideal for topiary, borders, and low hedging, this plant is all about effortless style with very little maintenance.

The modern urban jungle

Houseplants are big business, and the demand for that lush, tropical look is at an all-time high. But many consumers are tired of battling fussy exotics that demand greenhouse conditions. The 'modern urban jungle' trend champions hardy tropicals that deliver the aesthetic without the hassle.

Leading the way is *Musa sikkimensis* Ever Red (Lou 1'), a striking banana plant with vibrant maroon-striped leaves that bring the drama. Perfect for patios, terraces, or garden borders, this banana is surprisingly hardy down to -10°C. Just give it a bright spot and well-drained soil.

City cottagecore

A romanticised vignette of country life has taken over social media, but not everyone has the space for a sprawling cottage garden. Enter 'city cottagecore', where compact, repeat-flowering perennials and shrubs make the dream accessible, even on balconies and small urban plots.

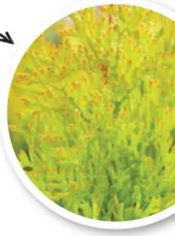
Agapanthus Midnight Sky ('DWAgHyb-01') (Everpanthus Series) is the perfect fit – a long-blooming African lily with deep purple-blue flowers that just won't quit. With its exceptional growth rate, extended flowering period and suitability for pots, it delivers a whimsical, overflowing look without the need for acres of land.

Dry spell savvy

With climate shifts bringing unpredictable weather, the 'dry spell' trend highlights plants that thrive in low-water conditions while still looking spectacular.

Aloe Safari Sunrise ('X5') is a standout choice, with its striking coral pink flowers that attract pollinators while requiring very little upkeep. Hardy and sculptural, this aloe is perfect for adding colour and structure to water-wise gardens and containers.

Can't-kill classics



For those who struggle to keep plants alive, 'can't-kill classics' is here to save the day. Conifers are making a comeback, with smaller sizes piquing the interest of urban and suburban gardeners in particular. *Thuja occidentalis* Sunny Smaragd ('Hoogi023') fits the bill with its bright yellow, sun-resistant foliage and low-maintenance, upright habit.

Easy to grow in pots or gardens, this thuja offers year-round interest without demanding too much from its owner – a true classic that's back in style.

Buzz-worthy botanicals

Wildlife-friendly gardening continues to gain traction, and 'buzz-worthy botanicals' celebrates plants that support biodiversity.

Diervilla rivularis Honeybee ('Diwibru01') is a top performer, drawing in bees and butterflies with its golden yellow flowers while offering year-round interest with vibrant foliage that turns copper-red in autumn.

Hardy down to -35°C and virtually maintenance-free, this shrub is a win for gardeners and pollinators alike.

Which of these fashionable flora will you be adding to your collection? *www.mrplantgeek.substack.com*

All images © Michael Perry

GARDEN MUSINGS

with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing AG contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

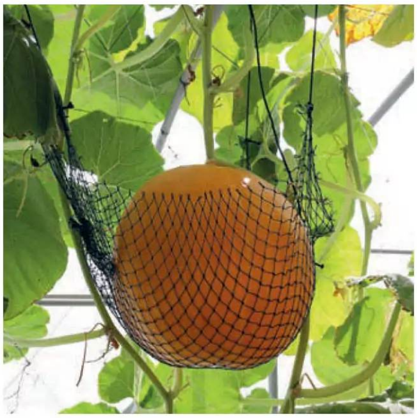
How to grow bigger and better squash

Bob explains why it's all about soil prep, feeding and support for greedy cucurbits

Bob reveals his squash-growing secrets

Squash of all sorts are very popular despite being relatively new crops. True, we've long grown marrows, likewise their baby sisters courgettes/zucchini, which are just that, baby marrows. As we've been growing these summer squash for so long, they've adapted and are fairly easy in an average summer and most varieties are conveniently bushy rather than trailing which means they fit well into beds. Pumpkins cultivated for Halloween rather than as food are also pretty tough plants, though hungry with a serious expansionist habit.

The newer, many-sized and coloured squashes have different ancestries so need more warmth than marrows, courgettes or even pumpkins, sometimes failing in a cold, dull summer. Almost all have a trailing tendency, not quite as rampaging as pumpkins, but inconvenient to confine in a neat, already full, vegetable plot.



Above: Winter squash benefit from vertical growing with supports

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Among the most popular are butternut types, which unfortunately are also among the more demanding, yet well worth producing as they are almost as tasty as sweet potatoes.

A good way of improving your crop of any squash, while keeping them out of the way, is training them up strings onto a fence, hedge, small tree or similar. By lifting the foliage higher, they get exposed to more sun so do much better.

Get creative with planting supports!

You will need to support their heavy fruits; net bags are good, old tights work brilliantly, and old bras become a certain talking point. However, if you want much better and larger crops, you must improve their planting sites.

Dig as large a hole as is practical, mix the soil with well-rotted manure and/or compost, and/or a preferably organic general purpose slow-release fertiliser, and repack it all into the hole, ideally forming a mound to plant on.

Prepare these sites as soon as possible then cover with black dustbin bags weighed down to warm the soil and suppress weeds, ready for planting in say five or six weeks' time. You can go a stage further and make temporary tents over the sites, using clear plastic sheets supported around 30cm (12in) off the ground on sticks and weighed down at the edges. This combination of black sheet and clear tent makes the soil welcomingly warm by the time planting arrives.

Don't forget to water well

The plants will get off to a flying start and their tents can be discarded when full of foliage because by then we will be well into summer.

Now, there is a very important thing with all this family, especially if you are after a prize pumpkin. Do not allow the first fruits that set to swell, apart from courgettes. If you do, the plants switch resources to the fruits, grow less vigorously and may do poorly. Instead, remove those first fruits, as this makes the plants grow more and make more leaves and roots which will lead to better and bigger harvests for you.

With stronger plants you can then allow the later fruits to remain, but even so, for fewer, much larger fruits, wait longer as the plants will respond and grow these superbly. And for a pumpkin, wait longer still, then leave just one and it should become enormous.

PS Do not forget to water all of these heavily to maximise squash success!

You can find out more about Bob via his website **www.bobflowerdew.com** and what's happening in his garden via Twitter (now X) **@FlowerdewBob**

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